The Perfect Companion

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The Perfect Companion

by MavisDaines

Summary

Hannibal finds a young Will Graham and grooms him to be the perfect companion.

The Meeting

The muggy air and constant chittering of insects remind Hannibal of bygone summers, of long stretches spent deep in the woods behind his uncle's home hunting any prey that had the misfortune of crossing his path. There is a heaviness in the air, a weight that makes each inhale seem more syrupy than the last.

Hannibal sighs, wipes the back of his brow, and then frowns at the moisture covering the sleeve of his plastic jacket. The jacket is certainly not helping any in this heat, but it is a necessary evil. Hannibal's new, bespoke suit is not going to be ruined by a pig, no matter how fast that pig runs or how quickly it darts in and out of the trees. With another sigh, Hannibal slides the blade from out of his back pocket and breathes in deeply, ignoring the smell of swamp and decaying soil.

There. Not more than fifty feet ahead. The smell of *fear*. It is ripe, so much riper than even the rotting salvinia that coats the stagnant water that stands, murky and dark, to his right. Hannibal takes another deep breath, appreciating the ripe scent as though it were a fine wine, before lightly treading over a moss-covered root and heading in the direction of his prey.

The swine thinks it is safe. It thinks it knows these woods well enough to escape its hunter.

The swine is wrong.

Hannibal hides behind a large cypress tree, eyeing the pig, waiting for the opportune moment. As soon as the pig turns its back, Hannibal lurches from behind the trunk and carves his blade deep into the swine's neck. Blood arcs into the air, smelling of salt and copper and warmth. Hannibal licks a few drops off his lips and pushes the blade deeper, until it scrapes against vertebrae and separates ligament from muscle. The pig squeals as it dies, falling to its knees in a blood-splattered heap.

"You tried," Hannibal murmurs, running a hand along the swine's curly, brown hair. "It is time now to rest."

With a final warbling moan, the pig keels over onto the ground. Blood mixes with dirt to form a maroon sludge. Hannibal smiles, smearing some of the liquid onto his fingertips before mixing it into the pig's hair. It is an improvement over the cheap hair gel that had previously held the hair in place. The sludge smells like salt and dirt instead of harsh chemicals, and the color blends in so nicely with the pig's scalp.

It doesn't take long after that. The pig is small, much smaller than Hannibal, and by the time the sun has begun to set, Hannibal has brought his prize back to his car and loaded it into the tarp-protected trunk.

The swamp animals are bolder with the coming night. They creep closer to his car, enticed by the scent of blood and sweat. One rodent even manages to reach his tire, sniffing along the black rubber and then grunting in displeasure at the lack of meat it finds. Hannibal looks

down at it coolly. The rodent need only glance at his eyes to see him for what he truly is, an apex predator cloaked in blood, before scurrying back into the swamp.

If only the pig had possessed such keen instincts.

Hannibal takes off his plastic jacket carefully, folding the blood-covered sleeves into the middle and then placing it into the trunk on top of his victim. He takes his time, switching out his muddy shoes for a pair of new leather loafers, careful not to step on any more debris before sliding into the front seat of his car. With a flick of his wrist, the car hums to life, headlights flashing on and spearing the forest in front of him with a bright beam of bluish light.

In the middle of the light is a boy.

Hannibal stares, trying to comprehend what he is seeing. He thinks for a moment—though he will never admit how long—that there is an angel in front of him, blocking his path. An angel with soft, curly hair that falls onto creamy pale skin. An angel with petal-pink lips that are chapped despite the humid air. An angel with dark blue eyes that shine in the blinding headlights. An angel that is shivering, covered in only a pair of threadbare trousers and an overly-large shirt, not even a pair of shoes to cover his small, dirty feet. Hannibal stares, drinking in his fill. And then he gets out of the car.

“Hello,” Hannibal says, almost a whisper.

The boy continues to stare. His eyes are not on Hannibal’s eyes, but rather his chin. Hannibal wonders if this is on purpose, or if the boy is in shock and unable to move.

“Are you lost?” he asks. There is no response. Hannibal wonders how much the boy has seen. He really doesn’t want to kill this child, and not just because the world would be a much uglier place for the loss. He tries not to kill children whenever possible. Pictures of Mischa surface in his mind, shivering and barefoot, and Hannibal quickly pushes them away.

When another minute passes and the boy still has not moved except for the shaking in his chest, Hannibal takes a tentative step forward. His foot sinks into something soft and pungent, and he grimaces, imagining the mess his new loafers will now track into the car.

“What is your name?” Hannibal takes another step forward, hands raised into the air as if approaching a stray dog. The similarities are certainly there (the shifting eyes, the hollow stomach, the sliver of hope upon seeing a friendly face). “If you are lost, I am sure that I can be of some assistance.”

At that, the boy finally raises his eyes to meet Hannibal’s.

And for a moment, the world seems to stop.

The boy’s eyes do not simply smolder with emotion; they scream out with feeling, throwing every possible emotion at Hannibal until he is stumbling back from the force. There is fear there, and anger. There is wonder. A curiosity that seems far too eager in the current circumstances. Those blue eyes seem to hold a bottomless depth of feeling, and with each

new emotion that is thrust at Hannibal, it is quickly replaced by another, and another. The headlights shine, Hannibal grasps at the front of his car for balance, and the boy continues to stare.

An empath his mind supplies, rather belatedly. Hannibal had heard of the gift before, the ability to see another's emotions as one's own, but he had never thought the experience would be so…visceral.

"You killed him," the boy says. His voice is deeper than Hannibal expected, though not by much. The words are spoken in a complete monotone, so different from the emotions being displayed by the boy's eyes.

"Yes," Hannibal breathes, unable to say more. He has never felt so unnerved in his life. He has no shame in admitting that he struggles to feel emotions like normal people do. Some say he feels none at all, though that is certainly not the case. His emotions are muted, but present. He likens it to seeing a fire through a window and understanding it is warm without feeling the flames licking into his skin. This, though…This is different. Terrifying. Exhilarating. Hannibal immediately becomes addicted to the feeling. There is no window now. The flames are in front of him, searing into the flesh on his face, and he wishes to be consumed by the fire until he is nothing by a pile of ash.

The boy opens his mouth, closes it, and then opens it again. "Why."

It's not a question, not exactly. Hannibal straightens up, still moving slowly, cautiously. "Does it matter? He is dead, now."

The boy finally breaks eye contact, and the moment he does, he collapses onto the ground, completely incapacitated. Hannibal rushes forward, cradling the boy's head in his arms and lifting him up. He weighs almost nothing; Hannibal immediately recognizes he is severely underweight. A curl falls over one of his eyes, and without thinking, Hannibal brushes it behind the boy's ear, feeling the silky texture beneath his fingertips, softer than anything he's ever touched before.

Hannibal takes the boy to his car and places him into the passenger seat, buckling him so his head rests against the window. With a firm press of his fingertips into the boy's throat, he quickly measures the boy's pulse. Forty-three beats per minute. Slow, but not completely out of the realm of normal after syncope.

By the time he's back behind the wheel, Hannibal wonders why he didn't notice the boy before. He'd been stalking this particular pig for some time now after being sold a boat with a defunct motor. In all those weeks, he had not once seen a child, and there were no divorce papers or any other sort of paperwork that mentioned a child, either. Judging by the boy's weight and general state of attire, it is safe to say that the swine in his trunk had neither cared for the boy nor ever accepted responsibility for him, despite clearly being his sire. The curly, brunette hair shared by the two is nearly identical, though one belongs on a pig and the other belongs on an angel.

Hannibal rolls his shoulder, a nervous habit he picked up in university. It was not his plan to bring a child back with him to Baltimore. He had thought instead to take his latest hunt back

to his home, experiment with a few new recipes, and then host a lavish dinner party to celebrate the end of summer. But plans change, and there was no way he was letting go of the boy. Not yet, at least.

With that decided, Hannibal reaches into his glove box and draws out a syringe. It glides easily into the boy's thin, fragile skin, and Hannibal watches a small drop of blood well up from the injection site when he slides the needle out. Without a second thought, he runs his thumb through the blood and brings it to his mouth, rolling it onto this tongue and savoring the taste.

It tastes of copper, yes, but underneath that is a sweetness, a burst of tang that makes his taste buds water and beg for more. He wants to lap at the wound, make it larger and larger until the arteries pulsing beneath the boy's skin yield and pour into his mouth like uncorked champagne. But if Hannibal drains him now, he won't have any for later, and that simply won't do. He must wait. He must be patient. And if there's one thing Hannibal Lecter has perfected over the years, it is the art of delayed gratification.

Will wakes to cotton in his mouth, crust around his eyes, and a searing headache that threatens to burst from his skull and spill all over the…pillow? Why is he laying on a pillow? Without opening his eyes, Will tries to assemble his thoughts, tries to remember how he came to be lying on the most comfortable bed he has ever touched. He remembers going to the creek, fishing pole in hand and an emptiness in his stomach that never truly seemed to go away. He caught a bass (or was it two?) and brought it back to the fire to cook. His father had come around, the first time Will had seen him in weeks, and demanded the fish. Will handed it over without a fight and still ended up with a swollen cheek for his efforts. There was a deer, or perhaps a stag, moving silently through the trees. A car in the woods. A man…

Will's eyes burst open, and he immediately lets out a weak groan at the sunlight streaming from the open window and into the bedroom. He looks around, eyes growing wider with each item he sees. There's a dresser across the room from him, carved from a dark wood and topped with a few pieces of art that look far more impressive than what Will had seen from his one field trip to the art museum in second grade. Under the dresser is a thick rug, plush and full, that stretches from one end of the room to the other. The bed Will is laying in is covered in a soft gray comforter. It feels almost like water underneath his roving fingertips, so silky that the pads of his fingers seem to melt into the fabric.

The door to the bedroom is open, leading into a hallway. Will smells something cooking, though he can't tell what, and the smell would be intoxicating if he weren't so nauseous. As it is, he barely manages to lean over the side of the bed before retching clear bile onto the floor; there's nothing in his stomach to purge.

There's a noise, the sound of something scraping. Will shudders and pulls the comforter up over his chin. He knows, logically, that the blanket cannot protect him from whatever is coming, but he still feels comforted all the same.

Footsteps echo down the hall, soft, never loud. They stop just outside the doorway. Will closes his eyes and tries not to breathe. The footsteps come into the bedroom. They pause near the bed. Will shuts his eyes even tighter.

“Hello.”

The voice is as silky as the comforter, trickling over Will’s ear like honey. The man has an accent that Will has never heard before, and he is ashamed by how badly he wants the voice to keep talking.

“There is no need to be afraid. I’m not going to hurt you.”

Will, in a moment of bravery, peeks open one of his eyes. Standing beside him is the man, the one from his dreams. Or were they nightmares? It all blends together in his head, what he can and can’t remember, and his memories seem to swirl around inside his brain until he feels dizzy from thinking.

“There we are,” the man murmurs.

Will glances at his chin. It is sharp and pronounced, jutting from the man’s sculpted face with only a hint of morning stubble. Will wonders what the stubble feels like, if it would prickle against his skin and burn, or if it is as soft as the blanket beneath his fingertips.

“Where…” Will coughs, feeling the remnants of bile in his throat. “Where am I?” He stares at the man’s chin, watching as it lowers and the man continues to speak in that soft, soothing accent.

“We are at my home, in Baltimore. This is one of the guest bedrooms. I have prepared some breakfast for you, though if you are feeling at all nauseous, I recommend a glass of water and perhaps some plain rice. There is a bathroom down the hall if you need it.”

With each word spoken, Will relaxes a bit more until he has sunk completely back into the pillow. He blinks, slowly, letting his lashes brush along his cheeks before speaking. “Who are you?"

“My name is Hannibal Lecter.” The man pauses, waiting. Will sighs and opens his eyes, again resting them on the man’s chin and no higher. “What is your name?"

Will figures he has already been kidnapped so there's no sense in withholding his name now. "Will."

"Will," the other man says, and his voice is far too sensual, far too husky, caressing the single syllable with a care that Will has never associated with his name before. "Will, I must ask you a very important question.”

You need to ask me *a question? I'm the one who was kidnapped and then woke up inside of a stranger’s bed.* Will does not voice these thoughts out loud, perhaps from the small sense of self-preservation that he’s finally developed after years of caring for himself.

“What do you remember?”

It is not the question Will is expecting. No, that’s not quite true. There are too many questions he was expecting for it to be narrowed down to just one. This one, then, must hold the most weight. How Will answers will likely decide his fate. He takes a fortifying breath and allows

his eyes to skim upwards, over wide lips and sharp cheekbones. Up, up, until he meets maroon eyes, the color so vivid that Will can't tell if it's the eyes or the blood dripping from them that causes him to gasp.

"You killed him. My dad. You shoved his body into the trunk like…like…"

"An animal?"

"*Yes*," Will hisses, spitting the word from his mouth. "Disgusting. He was disgusting. Unworthy. Even in his home, even in the woods where he had lived his entire life, he couldn't escape you, could he? You were too fast. Too strong. You are too strong, now. You could tear my eyes from my sockets like ripping a sheet of paper in two." Will tilts his head and stares into the eyes. "But you won't. You…are curious. About me. About what I can see."

Hannibal stares at him in awe, mouth slightly parted. Will can feel the man's warm breath blowing out, gentle, across his face. It smells of chamomile and some other herb. Calming. "Are you afraid?" His accent has grown thicker. It caresses each of Hannibal's words and blows them across Will's face just like the scent of gentle chamomile.

"No. I should be." Will tears his eyes away and notices his hands are shaking. He shoves them under his legs, hoping Hannibal hasn't noticed, too. But of course he has. His eyes are as sharp as Will's, the eyes of a predator, and Will knows that it would take months, perhaps even years, to learn how to be able to hide anything from this man.

"Yes, you probably should be. But you are not. You are able to pierce through any veil and know the truth of a person. Know, then, that I will never hurt you. Not unless necessity requires, but that is entirely dependent on your actions."

"Why did you do it?" Will hates how small his voice is. He stares at the gray comforter and traces a random pattern over the soft fabric. "Why him?"

"Perhaps one day I will share all the intricacies behind my decision. But I do not think today is the right time." Hannibal straightens and steps over the pile of vomit still lingering on the floor. "Let me ask you another question, Will, and then I will leave you alone." The words *for now* hang unspoken in the air. "Did you love him?"

Will jerks at the words, somehow more disturbed by this line of questioning than the previous. Did he love him? His father? Why does it matter whether Will loved him or not? His father is dead, and the man who murdered him is standing in front of Will in a pale blue sweater and pressed slacks, permeating a sense of calm that does not match the tone of their conversation.

"Did I love him." Will looks at Hannibal's chin once more and remembers the words spoken to him last night. "Does it matter? He is dead, now."

Hannibal nods once, stands for a moment longer, and then exits the room.

As soon as his footsteps can no longer be heard on the wooden floor, Will collapses into the pillow and begins to sob. He cries and cries until his throat burns and aches and his face is red and swollen. The pillowcase beneath him is drenched in tears. Will flips it over and shoves his face into the cool, dry silk.

Did you love him?

Will cries, not for the loss of his father, or for his kidnapping by the man who slaughtered him. He cries because the answer is *no*. He *didn't* love him. And he is so stricken by that answer, so cut to the core by his lack of love for the one person in his life who knew what he was, what he was capable of seeing, that Will feels as though his insides have been scooped out and tossed onto the floor. He lets out another sob, shuddering under the warm blankets, and refuses to open his eyes again for what feels like a very long time.

Eventually, his bladder begins to burn with urgency, and Will forces himself to sit up from the sinisterly soft pillow and swing his legs over the side of the bed. The mattress and frame are so tall, his toes barely skim the floor. He slides to the ground, careful not to step in the throw up from earlier, and tip-toes to the open door. His head still is fuzzy and each step is slightly swayed. By the time Will reaches the door frame, he has to pause and grab the wooden trim and take a few deep breaths before continuing.

The hallway stretches long and dark on either side, one end leading to a staircase and the other to more doors. One of the doors is open, and Will can see pristine tile peeking from the entrance. He wobbles to the bathroom and pulls the door shut behind him, listening to the soft *click* as it latches in place.

The mirror is not kind. Will has never particularly liked his reflection, and when his father kicked him out when he was nine, he stopped looking in them altogether. It was hard to see his reflection in the murky swamp water and fast-flowing creek where he caught his meals. Besides the water, there was hardly any other place for Will to glance a glimpse of himself, and it surprises him, now, how much older he looks.

His hair is lank and sticks to his forehead, connected by old sweat and tears. His eyes are bloodshot and rimmed with red. His nose is smeared with dirt, a perpetual problem, and his teeth are yellow and crooked. Even his clothes are worse than he imagined, too big (the bin he grabbed them from outside of town had little to offer) and stained with mud and dark maroon splotches that remind Will of Hannibal's eyes.

Will uses the toilet, yanks off his clothes, and proceeds to take his first shower in months.

It's heavenly.

Truly, nothing should feel so delicious, but the slide of warm water over his bared skin is enough to make him arch his back under the stream, as if being even an inch closer to the spray will keep the pleasure sizzling under his skin for longer.

There's a knock on the door.

“Will, I’ve left some clothing outside on the floor. Please, feel free to use the towel in there to dry off before getting dressed. I will go and reheat your breakfast.”

Will’s heart jackrabbits inside his chest, and he stands frozen under the water for several minutes. He quickly grabs the bar of soap that sits on the shower tray, noticing the scent of fragrant herbs and…milk? It does the job of removing the dirt and grime from his body anyway, and after another minute or two of standing under the warm water, Will makes his fingers shut off the tap and grab the towel hanging from a nearby rack. He pats himself dry and swallows, the sound loud as it echoes off the tiled floor.

It takes all of Will's bravery—a shallow well he thought he had already been drained dry—to open the door and grab the clothing sitting outside. He sets them on the vanity and examines each item in turn. There’s a plain white undershirt, large but less so than the top Will had been wearing the past few weeks. The pants are a soft, red flannel. A pair of black boxers sit underneath the outfit, and Will blushes a bright pink before shoving them away and grabbing his own dirty boxers from the bathroom floor. The last item is a pair of rolled white socks.

Will dresses quickly, his stomach finally filling with hunger rather than nausea. The pants are too long, but with a couple of rolls at the waistband, Will is able to walk without stumbling over the cuffs.

He stands in front of the closed bathroom door, hand poised over the doorknob, and waits. There is a dangerous man waiting for him downstairs. Despite Will's feelings (or lack thereof) toward his father, he was still the only family Will had ever known. And now he was gone, and Will was here, in a stranger's home, miles away from the only place he’d ever known. If he goes downstairs, there is no telling what he’ll face, what questions he’ll be asked, what answers he’ll be given.

Will's stomach growls, long and loud.

And so, like so many men before him, Will's fate is decided not by his brain, but by his stomach.

He turns the knob.

Decisions

Chapter Summary

Will decides what to do next.

Hannibal smells the boy before he sees him. He smells of the goat's milk soap that Hannibal keeps in each bathroom in his home—including his own. There is something…extremely satisfying about marking the boy in such a way. Underneath the soap is old sweat and dirt, bitter and pungent. Will must still be wearing at least one of his soiled items of clothing. Hannibal can easily guess which. Beneath even that is hunger, fatigue, fear, and…the faintest hint of curiosity. Hannibal smiles, all teeth, and removes the protein scramble from off the stove and onto a clean plate.

The boy stops just shy of the kitchen, small feet sticking out around the wall dividing this room from the next. Hannibal is both surprised and pleased that the boy has decided to come down at all. He clearly knows hunger, wears it like a second skin over his distended stomach and bony wrists, so Hannibal wouldn't have put it against the boy to simply slip back into the bedroom and continue to wait beneath the covers. It's a credit to Hannibal's skill in the kitchen—he hopes—that the boy is now waiting to enter.

"Please, come in," Hannibal says, keeping his voice low. The boy's toes grip the hardwood floor, unmoving, before shuffling around the wall and into the room.

The sight of the boy wearing his clothing soothes something primal in Hannibal's brain. The shirt is loose but clings to the boy's ribs where he hasn't properly dried the skin after his shower. The white fabric is translucent in places from the water, and Hannibal wants to suck the moisture out and taste the essence of the boy's skin straight from the source. The pants Hannibal had provided are rolled several times at the waist. yet excess fabric still drags along the floor, covering everything but the boy's toes. Hannibal lets his gaze roam freely over the lovely image, finally resting his eyes on the boy's face.

Like before, Hannibal is struck by the emotive nature of the boy's eyes, as well as his overall beauty. Almost like a Bernini statue come to life, mournful and evocative at the same time. What Hannibal wouldn't give to see the boy spread out like the *Ecstasy of the Blessed Ludovica Albertoni*, head thrown back in surrender, mouth slack and agape.

"Are you hungry?" Hannibal asks, lifting the plate with the protein scramble and setting it on the far end of the counter, as close to the boy as he can get without scaring him off. "It is not up to my usual presentation, but I hope it will suffice. It is an egg scramble with red bell pepper and sausage."

The boy lifts his nose into the air and sniffs like a dog. Something dark crosses his eyes before it jumps back into the pools of light blue. Hannibal sighs, besotted, and places a glass of freshly squeezed orange juice next to the plate.

“You do not have to eat in here if it will make you uncomfortable.” Hannibal watches as the boy takes in the heavy pots and pans, the sharpened knives, the marble mortar and pestle which weigh nearly as much as him. “Let me show you to the dining room.”

The boy nods and picks up the plate and glass, careful not to spill any food or drink onto the floor despite the desperate trembling in his hands. Hannibal walks around him and leads him into the next room. The smell of sage, thyme, and basil fills his nose, and Hannibal goes to check on some of his potted herbs as the boy sits down at the table. Hannibal pretends not to notice as the boy raises the trembling glass of juice up to his lips, taking the smallest sip before licking the excess juice from his mouth and setting it back down. He also pretends not to notice as the boy trades the cup for his fork, spearing a small bite of eggs and bringing it to his mouth with a slightly steadier hand. The moment the warm food makes it onto his tongue, the boy moans at the taste and sensation, blushing once the sound echoes into the large dining room. Hannibal smiles, preening, before rolling his eyes at his own behavior and going back to inspect his plants.

It only takes a moment for the plate to be emptied, the cup to be drained. The boy slumps into his seat when finished, following Hannibal’s movements with a lazy eye.

“What do you want from me?” the boy asks. He pushes the plate away from him so that it rests near the large candelabra centerpiece rather than wobbling precariously on the edge of the table.

It’s an interesting question. Not, *why did you take me*, or *what are you going to do to me*. This boy—Will, his name is Will—must be used to being taken from. And that makes Hannibal furious. Will clearly has so little to give to the average, untrained eye. No money or status or even physical strength. His true worth lies in his mind, and Hannibal is willing to bet his entire fortune that Will’s mind has never been truly appreciated for what it can offer. Not the way Hannibal values it, anyway. And even though others have not appreciated Will’s gift, they have taken and taken and taken from him until he feels like a well run dry, nothing left but dust and an empty bucket. Hannibal wishes to fill him back up.

“I do not wish to take anything from you.” Hannibal turns and sits at the head of the table. Will sits in the chair to his right, slumped and yet not relaxed. His posture screams of defeat, but the spark in his eyes says there is more than enough fight yet left in him. “I wish to give you…” Hannibal pauses, searching for the right words, the right placement of them in his mouth. He decides to start over. He *wishes* to give Will everything he possibly can, but the boy isn’t ready to hear that, not now. “I wish to help you develop your talents. It is clear you have some unique abilities. I wonder if you even realize what you are capable of, if given the chance.”

Will’s nose scrunches up, and he rises in his chair, placing closed fists onto the top of the table. “My curse you mean.”

Hannibal tilts his head slightly to the side. “Curse? Is that what you call it?”

“It’s what my dad calls it. Called.” Will falls back into the chair, suddenly drained. “He didn’t like what I could see, even when I wasn’t trying.”

“And what is it you can see?”

“Everything, if I want. And it’s not just from looking at people. Sometimes I'll be looking at something, like a car crash or scuff marks from a fight or even leftover trash and…it’s like a pendulum swinging in my head. I’m no longer me. I’m someone else.”

Hannibal works to steady his breathing, though there is little he can do to calm his rising heart rate. Will’s empathy is even more advanced than he had previously imagined. To be able to glean a person’s life, their motives, their actions, all from a single scene? There is no doubt in Hannibal’s mind that if there were ever someone who can see Hannibal, *truly* see him, it was the small boy sitting at his side.

“Do you enjoy being able to see these things?” Hannibal asks, though the answer is already clear.

“No. I hate it.” Will’s voice grows husky and his eyes glisten with unshed tears. “Sometimes I think about yanking my eyes from out my head so I won’t have to see anything anymore.”

What an absolute waste that would be. “I’m sure you could learn to control it, with proper time and care.”

Will scoffs. “Control? It’s like breathing for me. I don’t… *decide* to see things. It just happens.”

“Even breathing can be controlled, Will.”

Will stiffens at the use of his name. Hannibal sighs and stands up from the table. “The way I see it, you have two choices. You can be sent away to a boarding school and get an education. I would, of course, pay for the full cost, and I promise to provide for your every physical need. You would want for nothing, but we would never see each other again, and if you ever tried to tell someone what has occurred, I would have to kill you.”

Will waits, face pale and drawn, for the second option. “Or…” he prompts weakly.

“Or you can stay here. I would still provide for you physically, but I would also provide you with a…training, of sorts. For your ability. I can help you learn to control it and harness it so it does not overwhelm you whenever you look at someone or something.”

Will swallows, and Hannibal watches the movement of his throat, a long and inviting stretch of flesh just *begging* to be marked with teeth and bruises.

“Why.” Will’s voice is just slightly above a whisper. “Why do you care? Wouldn’t it just be easier to kill me now?”

Hannibal rolls his shoulders and widens his stance. “Easier, yes. I have never left someone alive once they have learned about my…proclivities. But I have also never met someone as unique as you, Will. It would be such a waste to have to kill you, and I abhor unnecessary

waste. I would feel honored if you were to allow me to help train you. Either way, the choice is yours. You do not have to make it now. I am sure you need some time to think."

Will nods, once, and Hannibal nods back. He takes the empty plate and cup from off of the table, carrying them out of the dining room and over to the sink to wash, mindful of the boy's uneven steps behind his back. There are no weapons currently within Will's reach, at least not any conventional ones, but Hannibal wouldn't put it past the child to try and make an escape now that he's been fed.

Hannibal washes the dishes with his back to Will, eventually turning around to face the boy once the plate and cup are dried and sitting on the counter. Will is resting with his hip against the counter, watching Hannibal's movements with a predatory gaze. His hands are empty and resting lightly on the marble surface. Hannibal smiles and puts away the clean dishes before gesturing for Will to follow him.

"I cleaned up the guest room while you were showering. I don't imagine you appreciate the smell of old bile any more than I do. You are free to stay inside the room and rest, though if you do wish to leave the room, I ask that you do not try and leave the house. I will know, and I will not be pleased." Hannibal doesn't specify anything beyond that. He has always found that vague threats seem to incite more fear than any gruesome specifics.

"You're letting me walk around the house?" Will asks, ignoring the last part of Hannibal's statement. "Isn't that dangerous?"

Hannibal follows Will into the guest room and takes a bottle of water from off the dresser, setting it beside the bed with the cap still sealed. "I have no worries about my ability to protect myself. You are a smart child. Smart children do not try and attack the only thing keeping them alive."

Will shudders, the scent of fear spiking in the air, and Hannibal turns back toward the door. Looking over his shoulder, he says, "There is no rush to decide what you want. I will be home today and tomorrow. If you have still not decided by then, arrangements will be made. I want you to succeed, Will. It is my only desire for you."

A lie, but a necessary one. Hannibal will not burden the boy with all his desires until the time is right. And if the time is never right, then Hannibal will simply shut those desires behind a locked door in his Mind Palace and not fret over them again. He will not force himself on the boy. He wants Will willing or not at all.

Will spends the rest of the day in bed, only getting up once to use the bathroom across the hall. He never sees Hannibal, but he can hear the man shuffling around downstairs, occasionally clanking together dishes in the kitchen. Once, Will swears he hears music playing, some sort of instrument he can't identify but that reminds him of a documentary on the Renaissance he watched in third grade, but his mind is still fuzzy with sleep so perhaps he is making the entire thing up.

Eventually, Will wakes up for a final time. It is past midnight now according to the clock on the bedroom wall, and Will wonders if his captor is awake still or gone to sleep. Will's

stomach lets out a pitiful moan, and he ignores it as always. Hunger is no stranger to him. He has spent more of his life hungry than not.

Quietly, Will slips from the bed and walks to the door, peering out into the hallway as he did that morning—or yesterday morning, now. The house is silent, but down the hall, one of the closed doors reflects a sliver of light onto the hallway floor. That must be Hannibal's room. And it seems as though he is still awake.

Sighing, Will walks back to the bed and flops down onto the comforter, running his hands over the silky smooth fabric.

He has no idea what to do.

Hannibal gave him two options, though really there are three: go to a boarding school and pretend everything is fine, stay here and pretend everything is fine, or try and run and end up killed or homeless. Will knows he can take care of himself, has been doing so for years, but that was back in Louisiana. Baltimore is not his home. It is not a place he knows, and without any means to travel, there is almost no chance Will would be able to return to the swamps he's come to see as more than just a place to live; they've settled into his heart, replacing his heartbeat with the rhythm the water makes when it laps upon a muddy bank.

That leaves the first two options. Will has no desire to return to school, though the chance to be away from Hannibal is tempting. The man confuses Will on every level. On one hand, he is terrified of both the man and what he is capable of. The other part of Will is almost… attracted to him, like a moth drawn to a deadly flame. Everything about Hannibal turns Will upside down, from the strength in his arms to the smoky curl of his accent over each carefully thought-out word.

Will feels a shiver run up his spine, and he quickly runs his hands up and down his arms, forcing the goosebumps away.

It would be so easy, he thinks, to run down to the kitchen and take one of the many knives back with him to the bedroom. To slip the blade underneath his pillow and wait for Hannibal to come check on him again. To grab the handle and plunge the blade into the delicate skin on Hannibal's vulnerable neck, so similar to how Hannibal killed Will's father…

It's a fruitless thought. Hannibal would recognize immediately that one of his knives was missing, and there was no telling what the man would do as punishment for Will's plan.

Will tosses from one side of the bed to the other, again ignoring the pang of hunger in his stomach. He tenses when there's a soft *click* from down the hall of a door being opened. A few seconds later, Hannibal appears in the doorway, leaning against the frame like a shade of Hades, all red eyes and shadowed features surrounded by a billowing black robe.

"Are you having trouble sleeping, Will?" Hannibal asks.

Will shivers at the sound of his voice, careful not to look Hannibal in the eyes. He doesn't want to know what the man is thinking, what thoughts of violence are no doubt currently occupying every corner of his brain.

“I’m fine,” Will says, with less conviction than he intended. He coughs, sits up so that his back is resting against the headboard. “I’m fine,” he says again.

“You are hungry,” Hannibal responds. Not a question.

Will pinches the bridge of his nose and ignores the current gnawing in his stomach, both sharp and dull at the same time. “It’s after midnight.”

Hannibal glances at the clock on the wall. “So it is. And yet, we are both awake. Why don’t you come downstairs, and I can fix you a plate of something to eat.”

Will stares at Hannibal’s chin, refusing to look any higher. “How did you know? That I’m hungry?”

Hannibal’s chin stretches with his smile. “Are you ever not hungry?” Will sighs and shakes his head. “I thought not. Come, the longer we wait, the worse you will feel, and I always try to keep my guests as comfortable as possible.”

Will lets out a snort at the word “guest” before he realizes to whom he is speaking. He immediately covers his mouth with a trembling hand, face going pale as all the blood sinks into his stomach. “I’m sorry,” he whispers, “I didn’t mean to–”

Hannibal tilts his head to the side and smiles even wider than before. “Is something amusing to you, Will?”

“No.” Will quickly shakes his head, curls flying out in a circle around his head. “No, I’m sorry. It won’t happen again.”

The smile slips from Hannibal’s lips, and Will retreats even further into himself. Oh god, he said something wrong, now Hannibal will kill him, just like he killed his father, just like Hannibal has killed dozens if not *hundreds* of people before him, all because Will couldn’t keep his stupid mouth shut, his father always said his attitude would be the death of him, he —

“Will, you’re trembling.” Hannibal walks to the bed and sits on the edge of the mattress, only a few inches from where Will sits, shaking from head to toe. Hannibal gently grasps his wrist, fingers easily wrapping around Will’s bones, and simply holds it. Will tries not to notice how warm Hannibal’s fingers are, how smooth the skin is, so different from his own callused fingertips.

After what seems an eternity, Hannibal releases his wrist and moves so that they are no longer touching. “A hundred and forty beats-per-minute. Not ideal. Certainly too elevated for a resting heart rate. Do you feel dizzy?”

Will shakes his head back and forth until he *does* feel dizzy, until the room and Hannibal are spinning around him in indistinct shapes and colors.

Eventually, Will is able to calm his body enough so that his teeth aren’t rattling around inside his skull. Hannibal watches him, cool and detached, before getting back up from the bed. “I

must insist on knowing the cause of your anxiety. I am not so ignorant to believe that I am not the source, but what was it specifically that triggered you?"

Tears prick the corner of Will's eyes, and he violently blinks them back. He will not be weak in front of this man, he *won't*. "You got mad at me. I thought…I thought you were going to kill me."

Hannibal sighs, and it sounds sad, aching. "I'm not going to kill you for being amused Will, nor will I take your life for any other trivial matter."

"But you could!" Will shouts. "You could! Do you realize how absolutely *terrifying* that is for me? Every second I'm with you, I feel like a mouse just waiting to be snatched up by a snake, and there's absolutely nothing I can do about it. How can I possibly decide to stay with you here when every moment could easily be my last?"

Hannibal stays still, not reacting outwardly to Will's outburst. Will can't do anything but close his eyes, waiting for the final blow.

It doesn't come.

"Will, look at me."

Will trembles a moment before slowly opening his eyes. He glances at Hannibal's chin and then down to the man's fingers, which are laying open, relaxed, in his lap.

"Look at my eyes, Will."

Will clenches his jaw and forces himself to look up. Hannibal's eyes are blank for a moment, an impenetrable wall, before they open and let Will in.

There is no blood now, at least as far as Will can see behind Hannibal's mask. There is curiosity, wonder, and at the very back…

Will gasps and breaks eye contact.

"What did you see?"

"You look like you want to *devour* me," Will says. "But not kill. You don't want me gone. You find me…interesting." Will frowns. "Amusing, perhaps? An experiment to toy with until I break, or you get bored."

"Is that really what you saw?" Hannibal doesn't sound displeased. He doesn't sound anything, really, voice perfectly monotone.

"...No." Will says. "I don't know what I saw. I don't understand it."

"That is perfectly fine. I don't expect you to understand everything you see, not yet."

Will lifts his head and looks at Hannibal's lips, watching them part slightly to take a breath. "But you do want me to see you. Eventually."

“Eventually,” Hannibal agrees. “For now, please know I have no desire to hurt you. I resent the idea. Nothing you say or do will change that, unless you try to leave. That is my only condition, and surely you can see why it is a necessary one. You’re very clever, Will.”

“Clever.” Will laughs, self-deprecating and low, and rubs at his eyes, suddenly exhausted despite having slept almost the entire day. “Okay. I think I’ve made my decision, then.”

Will can tell Hannibal is instantly alert, peering down at him with unnerving focus. “Oh? And what is that?”

Will takes a deep breath in and slowly lets it out. “I want to stay here. With you. I want you to help me with my…gift.”

Hannibal’s face spreads into a wide smile, as if he can’t help the sudden burst of happiness that shines brightly from his maroon eyes. “It would be my absolute honor, Will. Thank you for sharing this with me.”

Will leans back against the headboard and tries not to cry. “Okay. I think I’m going to go back to bed now.”

“Of course. If you need anything later tonight, I am just down the hall, and you are welcome to knock on my door at any time. I only ask that you do not come inside uninvited.”

Will peers up at Hannibal, noting the word choice. Is there going to be a time in the future when he is invited inside? The thought sends another shiver down his spine, and he pushes it away. “I won’t.”

“Wait here, then. I’ll go fetch something for you to eat. It is always harder to sleep on an empty stomach.”

The way Hannibal says it, Will almost believes that the man knows what hunger feels like, true hunger, the kind that freezes your hands and gnaws at your insides until the thought of food seems more like a punishment than a pleasure. But that doesn’t make sense. Will may not be used to wealth, but it is easy to tell from Hannibal’s home that the man is far richer than any person Will has ever come into contact with. How would such a man know hunger like Will does?

It seems only a blink before Hannibal reappears in the bedroom, a small plate in hand. It’s loaded with cured meats, cheese, and fresh grapes that glisten with drops of water.

“Something simple,” Hannibal says, voice forlorn. “You should know this is the first time in my life I have ever served food inside a bedroom.”

Will feels his cheeks go red, but he’s not sure why. “Um, thanks?”

Hannibal nods his head and hands Will the plate. Will closes his eyes and breathes in the scent of spiced meat, sweet fruit, and salty cheese. It’s heavenly.

When he opens his eyes, Hannibal is again peering at him with that strange intensity that makes Will’s stomach flutter and churn.

“Goodnight, Will,” Hannibal murmurs, walking away.

“Goodnight.”

Will watches Hannibal leave the room and waits to start earring until he hears the door open and close down the hall. As soon as it clicks shut, Will shoves food into his mouth at an alarming rate, as if he waits even a second longer it will disappear and leave him with an empty plate. In a matter of minutes, every scrap of food is gone, and Will feels fuller than he can ever remember being. Not one, but two meals in a day, and neither came from his own labor. It’s unheard of. Will worries he could easily get addicted to the feeling of being warm and sated.

It only takes a moment for him to slip back into sleep.

Bargaining

Chapter Summary

Will and Hannibal go shopping.

“Uncle Robertus? It’s Hannibal. *J'ai besoin d'une faveur*.”

“A favor? I’m surprised you have come to me for help.”

Hannibal pinches the bridge of his nose and forces his pride back down into his throat where it smolders like a burning coal. “I am as surprised as you. However, this is a favor that affects us both I’m afraid.”

The other end of the line is silent. Then, “Am I in danger?”

Hannibal does not deign that with a response. “I have decided to adopt a child. I wish to give him the Lecter family name. I need you to contact your estate manager and arrange the details. The child does not have a birth certificate or any other documentation, but those tasks I can take care of myself.”

Robertus lets out a long, slow breath into the phone. It crackles on Hannibal’s end like the popping of logs in a fire. “A child? Are you sure, Hannibal?”

Hannibal frowns and shifts in his seat, crossing one leg over the other. “Would I be calling you if I weren’t?”

“Very well. I’ll have it arranged. Your aunt and I are leaving for Lisbon tomorrow, so the arrangements might not be finished until next week.”

“Take all the time you need,” Hannibal replies. Now that Will has chosen to stay, it seems as if they have all the time in the world. It is still not enough. Hannibal wishes he had been given every second of Will’s time from the moment he was born until now. The force of his desire surprises him, and he uncrosses his leg and rolls his shoulders.

“May I ask the child’s name?” Robertus asks.

“His name is Will. Will Lecter.” Saying the name out loud causes a shiver to run down Hannibal’s spine. It sounds good. Right. Like Will was always meant to be his.

Perhaps he was.

“I will call you once it is done. Send me the birth certificate as soon as you are able.”

“Thank you, Robertus.”

“Of course, Hannibal. Good luck.”

Hannibal smiles and hangs up the phone. Luck? He is an apex predator, a man in his prime. He doesn’t need anything as banal as luck to get what he wants.

The morning is still in its infancy, the sun barely peeking over the eastern horizon and bringing precious beams of light into Hannibal’s office. It reflects the soft motes of dust that swirl up from the rug each time Hannibal moves one of his feet. He relaxes into his leather chair and allows the warmth of the light to glance over his face, so much softer than the fire burning in his mantle but welcome nonetheless.

Upstairs, Hannibal hears footsteps walking along the hall, slow and unsteady, before the sound of the shower turning on. Hannibal smiles, glad that Will is now awake and their day can truly start. It has been years since he lived with another person, and he had forgotten the…intimacy of hearing someone else get ready. The muted sounds of the faucet, the stumbling footsteps as they put on their clothing while still half-asleep, the creaking of hinges from doors and muffled yawns of stifled exhaustion. Hannibal listens with bated breath as the footsteps shuffle down the stairs. Just like yesterday, Will waits at the edges of Hannibal’s office instead of entering, almost as if he is asking for permission to enter the room.

“Will? Would you like to come in?”

The boy startles at the sudden noise and nearly smacks into the wall. Hannibal stifles the urge to smile, endeared by Will’s jumpiness and general unease. Hannibal wonders if that unease will go away as Will becomes more familiar with his surroundings, or if the apprehension stems from Will being uncomfortable with himself.

Will sticks his head around the wall and eyes Hannibal, wary, before stepping into the room. His hair is still damp from the shower, curls dripping droplets of water onto Hannibal’s handmade Persian rug. Hannibal cannot bring himself to care, not with the way the drying curls frame Will’s delicate features, a veil of brown and red and blonde that surrounds his pale skin and wide blue eyes.

Hannibal clears his throat. “How did you sleep”

“Fine.” Will runs a hand through his messy curls and leaves them sticking up at odd angles. “Thanks,” he adds, an afterthought.

Hannibal has no doubt that Will’s progeny did not teach him basic things such as saying please and thank you, so the fact that Will remembered to express his gratitude at all is a credit to the boy’s nature. “I’m glad to hear it. I have breakfast ready in the kitchen. When you are finished, there are several errands we need to run before I return to work tomorrow. Would you be amenable to leaving the house today?”

Will’s eyes widen with surprise. “You want me to leave the house? Won’t that be dangerous for you?”

Hannibal feels a strange emotion well up in his chest, one he hasn't felt in many, many years. *Pity* a voice in the back of his mind whispers. The emotion tastes of long nights spent outside in the woods, of empty stomachs, of knowing there was not a single being on earth who cared whether he lived or died. Hannibal swallows the taste and hopes it doesn't rise again. It gives him indigestion.

"I doubt it," he replies. "There is no record of your existence. No one is looking for you. Tell me Will, when was the last time you attended school?"

Will ducks his head and shifts his weight on the rug, embarrassed. "It's been a while. Maybe two years? I'm…not really good with time."

Hannibal nods his head, unsurprised. "As far as the state is concerned, you never existed, and what is one less boy wandering the swamps of Louisiana? There is no one who would recognize you, especially not here in Baltimore. You and I are perfectly safe."

"Okay." Will raises his head and stares at the lapel of Hannibal's suit. "Where are we going then?"

"Several different stops, I think. You need clothing and supplies, and there are only a few tailors that I trust with your attire. A few items for tonight's dinner would also not be remiss."

Will's face pales. He looks and smells even more terrified than yesterday when he thought Hannibal was going to kill him. "Clothes? For me?" He glances at the white undershirt Hannibal had left in the bathroom for him this morning as well as the old pair of sweatpants Hannibal had dragged out from the depths of his expansive closet. "But these are so nice. What's wrong with wearing them?"

Hannibal ignores the pity that swells inside him again and replaces it with disgust, a much more palatable emotion. "Those are barely even clothes, Will. I will not have my family running about Baltimore dressed like some street urchin."

Will shudders at the word *family* but doesn't mention it. "Uh, okay. If…if that's what you want, then I guess we can go shopping."

"Wonderful." Hannibal stands and points Will to the kitchen. "Eat as much as you want. I can always make more if you are still hungry. After that, we will leave."

Will walks into the kitchen and Hannibal grabs his box of recipes, perusing them while the boy eats. Will gobbles up bites of food without chewing, shoving one forkful of sweet potato quiche after another down his throat until half of the pie plate is empty, nothing but crumbs and a few lone chives left to cover the tempered glass. It's a gratifying sight, and Hannibal feels nothing but pride as he cycles through his recipes, trying to decide what to make for dinner. He had planned to use John Graham's liver to make a sauté with potatoes and parsley, but unfortunately, that particular pig had been more keen on drinking than raising his child, and the liver was filled with cirrhosis. The meat would be fibrous and bitter, not worthy of his —or Will's—palate. Instead, Hannibal would have to work with what remained of the lungs and then dispose most of the remaining meat.

“Did you write all those?” Will asks. He wipes a stray crumb from his mouth and sucks it off the tip of his finger. Hannibal stares a moment longer than is appropriate, his own mouth suddenly dry.

“I did, yes.” Hannibal picks out a recipe for *beuschel*, a lung stew that reminds him of the only good parts of his childhood, and sets it on the countertop. “I find a particular joy in cooking that I haven’t been able to replicate anywhere else. Experimenting with recipes is what got me through the trials of medical school.”

Hannibal pauses, surprised by how much information he just revealed of himself. He is always cautious about how much he gives away, each sentence carefully crafted to be polite but not revealing. And yet, here he is, explaining his innermost thoughts with a boy who he has only known for two days.

“I like to cook, too.” Will says. His lashes flutter closed, perhaps remembering a specific memory. Hannibal wishes he could pry open the boy’s skull and see the neurons firing and connecting as they recreate the mental image. “Not like you do, obviously. But sometimes, when things were good, my dad would let me have access to the kitchen. I made horrible soups and overcooked pasta and…it was fun.” Will’s voice goes quiet. “I liked it.”

“The only way we learn is through error. It’s admirable of you to recognize the pleasure of the act and not just focus on the final product.”

Will clears his throat and looks back down to the pie plate. “Yeah, I guess.” He tugs on one of his curls, now fully dry and fluffy. “Can I…can I have some shoes before we leave? It’s not that I’m not grateful for the clothes, I am, but I don’t have any socks to wear, and I don’t want to get your car dirty or embarrass you when—”

Hannibal stops the words tumbling from Will’s mouth by lifting one of his hands, palm raised into the air.

For a moment, he wishes he could go back in time and prolong John’s death. He would skin the bottoms of the swine’s feet so that the muscle is exposed and then slowly slice into each flexor and lumbrical until the man was screaming and writhing in agony, unable to ever take another step. How *dare* he create something as perfect as Will and then leave the boy in such a state that begging for shoes was the norm rather than some awful exception.

Hannibal has enough self awareness to realize he is somewhat projecting onto the boy. He knows what it is like to beg for scraps, whether it be food or clothing, and that is one of the reasons he is feeling such strong emotions for Will. On the other hand, there is something about Will that is unique which causes Hannibal to feel strangely protective and possessive. It is something he will have to look into later, perhaps when the boy is asleep and Hannibal has time to peruse his Mind Palace at leisure. Until then, he will need to keep careful control over what emotions he allows to slip in front of his mask.

“There is no shame in asking for what we cannot provide for ourselves. I am honored to provide for you Will, whether it be breakfast or a pair of shoes. Fortunately, I was able to order a pair last night. They should have already arrived by now. Let me go fetch them and then we can run our errands. I would never expect you to walk around Baltimore barefoot.”

Will relaxes against the counter with the grace of a fallen swan, shot through the heart by a hunter's arrow. "Thank you." This utterance of gratitude is infinitely more sincere than the last. Will was truly worried that he would be touted around town barefoot and underdressed.

"You are most welcome, Will. If you wouldn't mind putting your used dishes into the sink, I will go and see if the shoes have been delivered."

Will tenses, eyeing Hannibal as he walks out of the kitchen and into the foyer. It is an experiment, Hannibal thinks, to see what the boy might try with Hannibal gone for a moment. It leaves Will with unfettered access to the kitchen and all its utensils. Hannibal isn't worried. Should Will decide to grab a knife, Hannibal always keeps at least one scalpel tucked into the inner pocket of his suit, and he is more than capable of disabling the boy without permanently damaging anything.

Hannibal opens the front door and smiles at the sleek, black shoebox resting on his front porch. He had called in a favor last night with Mrs. Batas, one of the best cobblers on the entire East Coast. He had explained to her how he was recently in possession of a new ward and needed a pair of shoes for the day. They would visit her later this afternoon to begin filling out the rest of Will's wardrobe. Hannibal was counting on the older woman to be discreet in her efforts. Hannibal wasn't ready to introduce Will to society, not until Robertus had finalized Will as a member of the Lecter household.

Hannibal grabs the small box and closes the front door, making sure his footsteps are loud enough to be heard from the kitchen. He walks into the room and smiles at finding Will at the sink, handwashing his plate from breakfast.

"That is very kind of you, Will."

Will nearly drops the plate, grabbing onto the glass with white knuckles. "Uh, yeah. No problem." The tips of his ears burn a bright pink. Hannibal wonders if they would feel warm to the touch, if he could decipher Will's heart rate though the thin, delicate skin.

"The shoes arrived. I hope they are the appropriate size." They will be. Hannibal had measured the boy extensively when they first arrived in Baltimore and Will's sedative had yet to wear off. "Would you like to try them on?"

"S…sure."

Hannibal breathes in the scent of Will's embarrassment. It blooms red and spiced in his nostrils, like shavings from a Pequin pepper. He savors it for a moment before taking the box and bending so that he is kneeling in front of Will.

Will lets out a choked noise and arches his back against the sink as if to try and get away from where Hannibal is kneeling. "What are you…why are you…" Will takes in a shuddering breath and the scent of his embarrassment only grows stronger. "Why are you *kneeling* in front of me?" His voice is high-pitched, almost a whine, and Hannibal loves the light tenor of it as it lands in his ears, floating and trembling with emotion.

“I am making sure your shoes fit.” Without another word, Hannibal opens the shoebox and takes out a brown leather loafer, buffed and polished so that it nearly shows a mirror of Hannibal’s face as he peers at the shoe. “Remarkable craftsmanship as always.”

Carefully, slowly, Hannibal reaches out and grabs one of Will’s ankles, surprised at how delicate it feels in his hand. He is able to easily wrap all of his fingers around the joint with room to spare. Hannibal looks forward to the day when Will’s body is properly taken care of and each joint, each inch of skin, each *synapse* is the picture of health.

“*Hannibal*…” Will whines, and Hannibal shudders at the sound. It is the first time Will has ever said his name, and the way it rolls off the boy’s tongue is practically obscene.

Hannibal runs his hand over the arch of Will’s foot, noting the lack of depth and also the rough calluses that line the skin. It speaks of months (perhaps years) of walking around without a proper covering. Carefully, Hannibal lifts the loafer and slides it over Will’s foot. It slips on with ease and stops right where it should, with a few centimeters spared at the top for future growth. Hannibal runs his hand over Will’s ankle a final time—selfishly, gratuitously—before rising from his crouch and staring at the boy’s face.

If anything, Will’s trembling has only grown worse. His lips are swollen and cherry-colored from being bitten, and there is a bright red flush that stains the boy from his ears, over his gaunt cheeks, and down his exposed throat. Hannibal wonders how far the flush extends, if it would travel down Will’s sternum, perhaps over his stomach, continuing until it reached—

“I can’t accept these,” Will says. His voice is hushed but firm.

Hannibal frowns. “Why not? Are they not to your liking? I assure you, when we visit Mrs. Batas later today you are welcome to pick out any pair or style you wish. These are, of course, only temporary until we can get more.”

Will’s eyes go impossibly wide at the word *more*. “No, no, these are great, but it’s too *much* Hannibal. Yesterday, I didn’t own a single pair of shoes, and now you want me to just…accept these? And more?” He shakes his head, quickly jerking it back and forth. “It’s too much. I can’t.”

“You can, and you will,” Hannibal replies, keeping his tone kind yet unyielding. “You are no longer alone, Will. You are mine to care for and protect. And I take *very* good care of my things. I promise you.”

Will lets out one final shuddering breath before leaning back against the sink, uncaring of the soapy water that soaks into the bottom of his shirt. He seems almost in shock, staring at a point behind Hannibal’s shoulder with glazed eyes.

Hannibal takes a deep breath and scents the embarrassment that still clings to Will’s form. However, there is a new scent beneath that, some emotion he can’t identify, not yet. One day he will be able to easily recognize each and every possible emotion Will feels by scent alone, but until then, Hannibal will have to go the rather banal route of simply asking, “How do you feel?”

It takes a moment for Will to come back from whatever far off place his mind had dropped him. “I don’t know. It’s all tangled together.”

“Then let this be the first lesson in your training. In order to properly see others, and also hide from them, you must be able to control your own emotions. And the first step in control is recognition. Try and pick one thing you are feeling right now and explain it to me.”

Will finally peels his gaze away from the wall and lets it rest on the teal pochette tucked into Hannibal’s suit pocket. “Okay. I’ll try.”

“That is all I am asking.”

“I feel…overwhelmed.” Will lets a small smile spill onto the corners of his lips. “I think that’s right. I’m overwhelmed at what you have done to me. And what you are doing for me. You are confusing. One minute I’m scared of you and the next you are being far nicer than anyone has ever been.”

Hannibal tilts his chin down in understanding. “Wonderful, Will. You have done a wonderful job.”

If possible, Will’s face turns a darker shade of red. His pupils dilate, and the tip of his tongue peeks out from his mouth to wet his bottom lip.

“As much as I would like to continue our lesson, we have several appointments to make, and it would be unbearably rude to show up late. Why don’t you put on your other shoe, and I will grab my things.”

Will nods, glad to be given a task, and Hannibal has to stop the pleased purr that wants to jump from his throat. He makes quick work of pocketing his keys, wallet, and cellphone, checking to make sure the fire has gone out before closing his office door and heading back to the kitchen. Will has put on the other shoe, and Hannibal tries not to grimace at the combination of sweatpants and loafers. Though Will wears both with unnatural beauty, it is still an amalgam that should never have existed in the first place.

“Shall we?” he asks.

Will swallows, squares his shoulders, and follows him into the garage.

Will isn’t sure what he was expecting when Hannibal mentioned they were going shopping, but it wasn’t this.

Could the room they are in even be considered a shop? The sign over the building read *Garrison Bespoke* in a tasteful font that Will has never seen before. The inside of the store looks more like a clothing museum than a shop, with precious few items out on the floor or behind the counter. Interspersed among the slim racks are a dozen chrome mannequins that look like they belong in a scare house.

Hannibal seems completely at ease, looking at each item presented and then selecting several swatches of fabric from a book sitting on the cashier's desk.

"We'll need at least two single-breasted blazers." Hannibal glances at Will for a moment, staring into his eyes, before turning back to the salesperson. "One in royal blue and the other in black. I also want three white button-downs, two long-sleeved and one short. As for the suits…"

Will feels himself go lightheaded. "Suits? Why would I need a suit?"

Hannibal smirks and ignores his question. "A full canvas suit in dove gray will suffice. Make sure the legs are tailored in, I don't want the hems to flare at all. Another full canvas in black. That should do for now, I think."

"Of course, Dr. Lecter. Will you be needing anything today? Perhaps a matching set?"

Hannibal tilts his head, considering. "I suppose a matching jacket would not be remiss. My previous blazer in royal blue was quite nice. You already know my preferences."

"Yes, Dr. Lecter. The boy's measurements are all written down here, but if you would like to double-check…"

Hannibal walks over to the counter, and Will stares out the front windows, stunned and confused and full of some warm emotion he can't quite identify. Outside, the weather is windy but pleasant, the last days of summer still clinging on until fall comes with its frost and chill. Even in Louisiana, the weather would often get below freezing during the fall and winter, and Will has spent too many nights to count outside in the cold, huddled over a dying fire and wishing he were anywhere in the world but there, alone and shivering. Now, Will has exactly what he wished for. He never could have imagined the circumstances that led him to be here, though. He still can't understand what has happened to him, somehow, like a puzzle that's been put together but the final picture is still unclear.

"Will, are you ready to leave?"

Will had never been ready to arrive. "Yeah, sure. We can go." He glances over at the salesperson who stares back with barely-concealed envy. Will curls his shoulders into his chest and tries to make himself smaller.

"I think you will like our next stop a bit more," Hannibal says, easily reading his discomfort.

They walk over to the Bentley which had been parallel parked under a large chestnut tree. Back in Louisiana, there was a grove of chestnuts that Will loved to sit under and rest whenever the weather was nice. They grew along a stream where Will could sometimes find trout, or, if Will was especially desperate, the occasional crawdad.

The Bentley is a different car than the one Will was…transported in from Louisiana to Baltimore. This is all sleek black metal and luxurious leather. The other car was used, and even though Will doesn't remember the inside, he does remember the pervasive smell of blood.

“What are you thinking about, Will?”

Will sighs and again tries to make himself look smaller from the passenger seat. The seat belt cuts into the bottom of his chin, no matter how he adjusts it.

Hannibal smoothly backs out onto the road and begins driving north, further into downtown. “How about this; I ask a question, and you ask one back. I promise to answer with as much honesty as I can. I hope you will extend me the same courtesy.”

“Uh, okay.” Will shuffles and pulls on the seat belt strap, wincing when it snaps back under his chin where the skin is already red and irritated. “Is your first question the one you already asked?”

Hannibal nods.

“Um…I was thinking about your car.”

“Oh? What about my car.”

Will frowns, trying to keep the words inside his mouth, but really he has never been able to properly hold his tongue. “You already asked your question.” He waits, ready to be struck across the face, or perhaps Hannibal will take away the new loafers that seem already molded to Will’s feet, or simply just toss him out of the car and rid himself of the troublesome boy he never planned to bring home.

Hannibal does none of those things. Instead, he laughs. “Clever boy. Fine, I shall wait my turn.”

Will relaxes back into the leather seat and runs his fingertips along the fabric of his sweatpants. “Okay. My question is…your accent. I’ve never heard anything like it before. Where are you from?”

“An excellent question. I was born in Lithuania, which is where I get most of my accent, but I lived for a time in France.”

“Oh wow, that’s pretty neat.”

Hannibal’s lips tilt up at each corner. “I suppose it is *pretty neat*, as you say. Now, what were you thinking about my car?”

“I was comparing it to the car in Louisiana. The one where you, uh. Put my dad.”

“Ah, I see.”

The car is filled with an awkward silence as Will squirms, trying to think of another question, one that won’t trigger Hannibal but will still provide an insight into the mysterious man. “Do you like your job? At the hospital, I mean.”

“I do, though surgery can be both physically and emotionally taxing. I am actually thinking of changing professions, now that you mention it.”

Will wants to ask why, but it is not his turn. This time he manages to bite his tongue before letting the words escape.

Hannibal pulls into a parking spot in front of a small grocery store. It is made entirely of brick and has the words *Javon Natural Goods* over the glass doors. Will waits for Hannibal to undo his seat belt before releasing his own, following the man as he strides, confidently, into the store.

The store is nothing like the worn discount stores that Will frequented as a young child. This one is fairly empty, but each shelf and aisle is filled to bursting with fresh produce, meat, and cheeses, with an entire section dedicated entirely to wine—at least, that's what Will assumes is in the hundreds of dark brown and green glass bottles. He's never actually seen wine in person, only glimpses from movies when his father let him turn on their old TV.

Hannibal walks over and grabs a basket—wicker, not plastic—and then turns to face Will.

"My next question: what is your favorite food?"

Will goes rigid, still stuck near the front door. His favorite food? It should be an easy question, something everyone has been asked before (Will can't remember ever being asked before). There has only been one consistent food in his life since his father kicked him out two years ago. Will decides it's as good an answer as any.

"Fish," he says.

Hannibal nods like this is a perfectly reasonable answer, and maybe it is. Maybe lots of kids Will's age prefer fish to all else. Somehow he doubts that is true.

"A superb choice," Hannibal says.

Will blushes at the praise, feeling a sudden warmth that drips from his stomach down to his toes. It makes him almost lightheaded, and he quickly shakes it off, going to stand by Hannibal in front of the seafood.

"What is your favorite food?" Will asks.

"I enjoy meat of all kinds, though I am particularly partial to pork." Hannibal grins, but Will doesn't understand the joke if there is one.

They continue the rest of their visit to the grocery store in a similar manner, mostly questioning one other over food or other trivial subjects. Will learns that Hannibal is self-taught in the kitchen, he prefers cooking to baking, and one of his greatest joys in life is hosting dinner parties at his home.

The next stop they make is to another clothing store, and Will is infinitely more comfortable in this one than the last, though he is still uneasy with how much Hannibal is buying. With each additional item brought to the register, Will feels a small stone drop into his gut, weighing him down until he can barely walk from one end of the store to the other, each step like raising his foot out of mud.

Hannibal stops in front of a package of plain black briefs, and Will finally snaps.

“Do we really need to get those? I mean, I have a pair already. We can just wash them.” Will is burning up, and he isn’t sure if it’s embarrassment or if he is coming down with a sudden illness. Knowing his luck, it’s probably a combination of both.

Hannibal does not look angry. He doesn’t look anything, really, his mask perfectly in place over his eyes when Will gathers the courage to look into them. Will realizes just how special that moment was, when he looked at Hannibal for the first time in Louisiana and saw all of his emotions splayed out. Will doubts there are many people alive—perhaps none—who have seen Hannibal like Will has.

He isn’t sure how that makes him feel. (He does. It makes him feel good).

“Will, I appreciate the concern, but no person should own a single pair of underwear. Even the incarcerated are allowed more than one pair of undergarments at a time. Please, I know it makes you uncomfortable, but it is a necessary evil.”

Will huffs and shoves his hands into his pockets. He doesn’t tell Hannibal that he has owned the same single pair of briefs for over six months. Hannibal probably already knows.

“I think that counted as your next question,” Hannibal quips, grabbing several packages of briefs and bringing them to the register near the front of the store. “How old are you?”

Will bites his lip hard enough to taste blood. The familiar coppery taste soothes him until he can finally choke out his answer. “Twelve, I think. I’m not really sure.”

At this, Hannibal lifts an eyebrow. It would be a comical look on any other person, but on Hannibal it merely looks refined. Dignified.

It’s unfair.

“You think? I must insist on breaking our rule and ask a second question. Do you know your birthday?”

Again, Will bites down on his lower lip. Hannibal eyes the movement and reaches out with one of his hands as if to touch Will’s mouth and soothe the injury, wipe away the welling drops of blood until all that’s left is the taste of his skin against Will’s tongue. Will jerks away, and Hannibal immediately drops his arm back down to his side.

“I apologize,” he murmurs. “I know you are sensitive to touch.”

Will’s eyes prick with tears. It is awful how many times he’s cried these past few days, and even more awful that Hannibal has not said a word about it, quietly allowing him some dignity as he struggles with his emotions. “Obviously I don’t remember when I was born. My dad never told me my birthday. We never celebrated it growing up. So no, I don’t know my birthday, or how old I am, or any other basic thing that every person should know about themselves.”

The tears spill over then, glistening down his face before dripping onto the collar of his white shirt. Hannibal's white shirt. Another thing Will can't do right, messing up one of the only items of clothing he had ever been gifted in his entire life.

This time when Hannibal reaches for him, Will allows himself to be pulled into the embrace. His head reaches the crook of Hannibal's arm, and Will puts his nose into Hannibal's side, gulping in his scent. He smells of expensive, spicy cologne and sour wine and, underneath all of that, a musk that is completely unique to him.

"Take your time, Will. I am not going to leave you."

Will lets out another sob, trying to ignore the fact that he is standing in the middle of a store while having a breakdown. He supposes it's as good a place as any to have one. And really, considering what has happened the past few days, he is allowed to have a little emotional whiplash.

Eventually, Will's tears stop flowing, and he pulls away from Hannibal's arms, no matter how badly he wants to stay. He wipes the remaining tears from his face, ignoring the snot on the back of his hand, and then watches with something akin to wonder as Hannibal grabs the teal fabric from the pocket of his suit and hands it to Will.

"I can't use this," Will whispers. "It's too nice."

"Nothing is too nice for you. The mere idea is absurd. You are worth a thousand pochettes, a million of them, even if they were made of the finest silk and imported straight to my door."

Will crumbles under the praise, feeling as if his entire world is being turned upside-down in a few simple sentences. But he already had his momentary lapse of control. He already showed his weakness to Hannibal and the world. Now is the time to shore himself up, not let himself go.

"Thank you." Will gently takes the piece of fabric and uses it to dab at any lingering moisture left under his eyes. He then hands it back to Hannibal, who tucks the teal square into the pocket of his trousers without a second thought.

"I think we are done here. We have one more stop planned, if you are feeling up for it. There is no shame in needing to return home."

Home. Such a strange word. Will wonders when Hannibal's home in Baltimore will come to feel like home to him, if ever. "I'm fine. We can go somewhere else."

"If you're sure." Hannibal walks over to the register, pays, and then grabs the obscene amount of bags and packages that he purchased without letting Will carry a single one. The trunk of the Bentley is overflowing by now, filled with Will's clothing, the groceries, and a small cooler for the fish Hannibal bought for their dinner tomorrow.

The last stop of the day goes quickly, much to Will's relief. He is tired after his breakdown and feeling hungry—though what else is new. Mrs. Batas is an elderly woman with a similar accent to Hannibal's, but because of her dentures, Will can only understand about a third of

what she says. After picking out a few pairs of shoes, including more loafers, two pairs of sneakers, and a pair of supple, hand-stitched boots that Will can already tell will be his favorite, he and Hannibal leave the store and head home for lunch.

“Thank you,” Will says once they’re back in the car. He feels like a broken record, but is there anything else he can say? No words can probably describe the gratitude, the sheer *wonder* of being lavished with so much time and attention as he has been from Hannibal. All for him. All from a killer.

“You’re welcome,” Hannibal says. He sounds extraordinarily pleased with himself, with the current situation.

Perhaps it really is that simple.

Return to the Outside World

Chapter Summary

> Hannibal returns to work. Will is learns more about his health and helps Hannibal make dinner.

Hannibal walks down the halls of Johns Hopkins with ease, watching with barely-concealed amusement as nurses, interns, and patients alike all shuffle to the side to make room for him. Despite being the youngest surgeon in the entire building, Hannibal had carefully cultivated both his reputation and his career with a watchful eye, none of which was in vain. Even though he had obtained his position only last year, he still was treated with a level of respect that some lifelong surgeons never succeeded in obtaining.

It…frustrated Hannibal, how easy it was for him to reach his peak. There was no thrill in surgery for him anymore, no challenge or struggle. One body blended into another until the sight of a scalpel scraping across carefully sterilized skin was as exciting to him as cracking open an egg, perhaps even less so. At least with cooking there was an art, an exploration. In surgery there was just the threat of monotony as his creation was hidden behind walls of uncaring flesh.

Hence the change in career.

“Dr. Du Maurier. A moment of your time, please.”

Dressed in a slim pencil skirt, sensible heels, and an ironed white blouse, Dr. Du Maurier stands out in the sea of scrubs and tired faces. She glances at Hannibal from across the hall, thin lips drawn into a frown as she looks him over with a slow, calculating gaze.

Hannibal, unperturbed, uses his long legs to reach her in a few strides. The rest of the hospital rabble passes on Hannibal’s right, yet he stands firm against the wave of swine, a shepherd and wolf in one.

Dr. Du Maurier watches this behavior with guarded eyes. “I am very busy, Doctor…”

“Doctor Lecter. I apologize for the inconvenience. I tried reaching out to your office and was informed you are no longer accepting new patients.”

Dr. Du Maurier tucks a strand of blonde hair behind her ear, revealing a pair of pearl earrings. Genuine, from what Hannibal can tell, and the perfect shade of light purple to match the undertones in her skin. “That is true. Though I suspect you are not looking for a psychiatrist.”

“No. I am, however, in need of a mentor. I understand that might not be possible, and if you are not available then I would be most grateful for a referral instead.” Hannibal has no plans

on studying under any doctors but Dr. Du Maurier. His scrupulous research had revealed that while respectable surgeons are rare, respectable psychiatrists are rarer still, and he won't let this one slip away so easily.

Dr. Du Maurier lifts a razor-thin eyebrow. It carefully arches over her tasteful eye makeup, and Hannibal briefly allows himself to be impressed with how inscrutable her expression is. Few are able to hide from him. It only solidifies his belief that she would be the perfect mentor for him as he transitions from surgery to psychiatry.

"I see." She looks at him for a moment longer before reaching into her purse and drawing out a business card. Hannibal takes it, already knowing it will go into his desk rather than the rolodex he keeps in the kitchen. "This is the number for my personal cell. Let's set up a meeting. I have another client I need to visit, and I don't wish to be late."

Hannibal nods, serious. "That would be incredibly rude."

"Certainly. I can't tolerate rudeness."

Hannibal allows himself a nebulous smile. "You and I have that in common, doctor."

"Please, call me Bedelia."

Hannibal tilts his head. "And you may call me Hannibal. I look forward to our meeting."

Bedelia shakes his hand, a few firm pumps up and down, before stepping through the door that leads to the staircase. It's a brave endeavor considering they are on the sixth floor and Bedelia's heels are at least two inches high. He isn't sure whether that shows her to be intrepid or simply stubborn. Hannibal remains near the door to the staircase for a short time, thinking, before reaching for his pager and fortifying himself for another tedious surgery.

The entire time he is prepping, he allows his thoughts to wander to Will, as they have the entire day. It takes every ounce of his self-control to not step into the hall, grab his cellphone, and open up the app that shows him the security footage from around his home. Even before Will was his guest, Hannibal had decided to install cameras in every room of his house except for his bedroom and master bathroom. It was a wise decision, and he is grateful he had the forethought, but it has proved a constant temptation throughout his twelve-hour shift. Just the thought of Will's chocolate curls or delicate wrists is enough for Hannibal to want to throw away his surgical apron, run to his car, and drive home without a second thought. Luckily, he has managed to control this urge throughout the day, but he's not so sure that he will be able to tomorrow, or the day after that. Will is proving to be a most vexing desire, a drug so powerful that even seeing it through a glass screen is enough to have Hannibal's heart racing with hunger.

"You ready, doctor?"

Hannibal sighs and tugs on his mask so that it rests smoothly over the bridge of his nose. "Let us begin."

The surgery goes smoothly, as all surgeries Hannibal performs do, and the next two he performs after the first are no different. By the time Hannibal finishes his shift, the sun has long set behind the horizon, and his feet have the pleasant ache that always accompanies a successful day of work.

The drive home is as uneventful as ever, and it's not until Hannibal has pulled into his garage that he feels the first surge of *some* emotion other than boredom since he spoke with Bedelia earlier in the day.

Hannibal rises from his car, shutting the door gently behind him, and walks to the garage door with sure steps. After putting in the pin, he makes sure to open the door loudly so that Will won't be alarmed at his sudden appearance. When Hannibal checked his phone only a few minutes ago, Will had been sitting at the small table Hannibal had set up inside the guest room, reading one of the books Hannibal had selected in case Will needed some mental stimulation to break up the monotony of the day. The books were at a very low reading level, as Hannibal still wasn't sure how much education Will had received during his unorthodox childhood.

The garage lock is new. Yesterday evening, Hannibal had called in a twenty-four-hour home security company to come and retrofit a padlock on the front and garage doors. It allowed the doors to be locked from both the inside and outside, and the only way they opened was through a pin that Hannibal had memorized before going to bed. Hannibal does not expect Will to try and make an escape—with no money, no connections, and no one to believe his story, it would be an extremely foolish move, and Will has already proven himself to be more clever than any other child that Hannibal has had the pleasure (though usually displeasure) of meeting. Still, the locks provided Hannibal with a small sense of security throughout his long shift. Unless Will climbed out a window, he was safe inside Hannibal's home. Their home.

"Will, are you there?" Hannibal calls, knowing the question is meaningless but asking it anyway. Of course Will is there. Where else would he be?

There's a distant crashing, perhaps Will dropping one of his books onto the floor, and then the sounds of muffled cursing as he picks it back up and races down the hall. By the time he reaches the top of the staircase, Will looks as if he'd just chased an animal through the words. His chest is heaving with uneven breaths, his cheeks are flushed with color, his eyes are sparkling, and even his clothing is rumpled and askew. It brings to mind other activities that might cause such a state, and Hannibal hides the dryness in his mouth with a small cough.

"You're home," Will says, another unnecessary observation.

"I am. I brought the supplies I mentioned last night. I would be most grateful for your assistance in bringing them inside."

"Oh, uh yeah. Sure. No problem." Will walks down the stairs at a slightly calmer pace than the one he used to run down the hall. It's a miracle, really, that the boy makes it to the bottom unscathed. He's dressed in a pair of thick, fitted jeans, with a gray ribbed sweater on top that is easily the softest item of clothing Will received yesterday from their shopping excursion. Hannibal can imagine Will running his fingers over each new item with wonder, working up the courage (the conviction) that yes, he is allowed to wear these clothes. Hannibal can no

longer smell the stench of months-old dirt and sweat, so Will must have finally given in and put on a pair of fresh undergarments. Hannibal would need to take away the old pair and throw them out before Will insisted on washing and re-wearing what was now only a pile of rags held together through stains and sheer luck.

Hannibal points to the garage. “This way, please.” Though Hannibal had given Will a tour of the house yesterday, he hadn’t shown him the garage. Or the basement.

One step at a time, Hannibal supposes.

“I must thank you again for allowing me to conduct this examination. I am well aware of your aversion to touch, and the sacrifice you are making for the sake of my peace of mind does not go unnoticed.”

At this particular morsel of praise, Will’s ears flush a delicate pink that Hannibal is quickly becoming addicted to seeing. The spicy red scent of his embarrassment floods the air as well as the second emotion Hannibal has not yet identified but thinks might be related to pleasure. It’s a sweet scent, thick and viscous like honey, and Hannibal wishes he could bottle it up and lay it on his tongue each night before falling asleep.

Will doesn’t say anything, and Hannibal doesn’t expect him to. Eventually, the boy will learn to accept praise, come to crave it with the same ferocity with which Hannibal wishes to bestow it, but until then Hannibal will allow Will to blush and squirm and do all manner of delicious things instead of allowing the praise to settle over his beautiful curls like an invisible crown.

“Here is the garage.” Hannibal cups his hand over the new keypad and punches in the code. “It cannot be opened without the code, but if you ever wish to enter, simply let me know.” Hannibal pushes the door open and walks to his car. Will stumbles in after him, eyes taking longer to adjust to the dimmed lighting. Hannibal’s eyes have always seen better in the dark compared to the average human. He has never known why, whether it be some mutation acquired in the womb or a genetic variation passed down through his parentage or simply something he learned due to spending so much of his life surrounded by darkness; it certainly isn’t something he has ever complained about.

Hannibal pops open the trunk of the Bentley and hands a plastic tub to Will, watching the boy struggle despite how light the bucket is. Hannibal grabs the second, heavier tub and closes the trunk with his elbow. The two of them step back into the house, and Hannibal uses the tip of his non-slip clogs to close the door behind them.

Will sets the bucket down as soon as the door shuts, breathing deeply and with effort. Hannibal frowns, sets down his own tub, and walks so that he’s in front of the boy.

“Sorry,” Will breathes, voice barely audible among the rush of escaping breath. “Just… need…a break.”

“Of course, Will. I don’t want you to overexert yourself. In fact, why don’t we just have the examination here in the living room.” Hannibal opens the nearest tub and snaps on a pair of nitrile gloves. “We’ll start with your vitals once you catch your breath. After that, I’ll look at

your face, lymph nodes, and other extremities. I will also listen to your heart and lungs. At the end, I have to take a blood sample." Though Hannibal does not specialize in pediatrics, he's had enough children come to him in the trauma ward to know that they prefer a clear list of what will happen rather than the nebulous concept of future stressors that may or may not occur.

"Fine," Will says, tucking his hands into his armpits to try and stop their trembling. His fear smells of decaying fruit left to rot on the ground, both sharp and sweet. Hannibal lets it waft into his nose like a fine wine, allowing himself to appreciate the scent before he continues his preparations.

"Do you remember what I told you yesterday?"

Will stiffens and stares down at his feet. He's wearing a pair of wool socks, slate-colored and thick. Hannibal watches the boy's toes wiggle on the hardwood floor, one at a time. A nervous tick, perhaps? Or maybe Will was simply luxuriating in the feeling of having fabric to cover his feet for the first time in months, possibly years.

Hannibal thinks, not for the first time, that he would give anything to reanimate John Graham's corpse simply so he could take the man apart with excruciating accuracy, one flayed nerve ending at a time.

Will huffs out another breath before responding, "I remember. Just…yeah. Give me a second."

Hannibal tilts his head. "Take all the time you need." He walks over to a nearby lamp, twisting the switch so that the room is filled with warm light, not just the beams from the blue canned lights overhead. By the time Hannibal walks back to his medical supplies, Will has begun gently removing his clothes, starting with the sweater. He pulls it over his head in one jerky motion, flinging it to the floor before changing his mind and picking it up, rolling it up in a facsimile of a fold, and laying it on top of an armchair. The jeans are next, slowly peeled from Will's skinny legs and again rolled into a loose ball before being placed on the armchair. The sight of Will only in socks and briefs should not be as stunning as it is, and yet Hannibal is nothing if not bewildered by each stretch of pale skin that is slowly exposed to his greedy eyes.

"Thank you, Will. I understand how hard this must be for you."

Will grunts, hands shoved once more under his armpits, and waits for Hannibal to start the examination.

Will has never felt so exposed in his entire life. He feels peeled, like an orange whose rind has been ripped away so that only the soft inner flesh is left, ready to be devoured.

He has no memories of visiting doctors as a child, not even the school nurse when his dad had moved to a nicer suburb outside of Shreveport and–for the first time in Will's life–they stayed in the same place for more than three months. Just seeing Hannibal in those peculiar gloves is enough to have his heart racing in his chest. Will isn't sure he'll survive the night.

“Can I leave on my socks?” Will croaks, hating the weakness in his voice but unable to muster up any more conviction. All of his bravery had been tucked into the clothes that sit on the armchair, bunched into ugly piles because he never learned to fold. Never had clothes to fold before, only the ones on his back that were either being worn or tossed into the stream for washing until they eventually turned to threads that ended up as rags Will used in place of an actual pillow.

“I want you to be as comfortable as possible, Will. I see no issue in leaving on your socks.” Hannibal rolls his shoulders, and Will forces himself to look into the man’s eyes rather than at his chin. Hannibal’s maroon eyes look softer in the light from the lamp, thrown into shadows from his long, curved lashes. Will sees no malice in the man’s face, no desire to hurt Will. The man’s mask is impeccable, but Will’s curse (gift) is strong, and he feels confident that if Hannibal intended to hurt him at all, he would know.

“Okay.” Will lowers his gaze until it reaches the hardwood floors. There is not a single scratch on the dark wood, not even near the furniture, and Will wonders if Hannibal has ever owned a pet. He seriously doubts it. Perhaps that’s what Will is, now. Hannibal’s pet to poke and prod until he breaks and Hannibal throws him out.

“I’m going to start by taking your temperature.” Hannibal reaches into one of the buckets and lifts up a small white device. “This is an ear thermometer. I’m going to put it into your auditory canal for a few moments. Is that acceptable to you?”

Will doesn’t think he’s ever had anything inside his ear besides his own finger, but he doesn’t mention that to Hannibal. “Yes.”

Hannibal smiles, pleased, and Will tries to control–unsuccessfully–the shiver that courses down his spine. “Excellent. Let us begin.” The man takes one step, then two, until he’s standing directly in front of Will. Without his sweater, Will is able to feel the body heat coming off of Hannibal, and his skin seems to react in an instant, gooseflesh rippling over his torso at the unfamiliar sensation. Hannibal’s scent is as intriguing as ever; his cologne has worn off from his long shift, and instead of spice there is the sharp spike of antiseptic, the chemical rubber of the gloves he put on, and underneath all that the musk that is entirely *Hannibal*. Will takes a deep breath and allows the scent to calm his racing heart. Unfortunately, instead of calming his heart, the smell of Hannibal only makes it beat faster.

Hannibal slowly reaches his hand down to Will’s chin, cupping it in one palm and tilting his head to the side so that his neck is twisted and his right ear is entirely exposed to the doctor. Will shivers, amazed he can feel the heat of Hannibal’s palm even through the gloves.

“I’m going to insert the thermometer, now,” Hannibal says, voice deep and rumbling. His accent is thicker, dripping off of each syllable like molasses. Will braces himself, jerking back as the cool plastic sinks into his ear. It doesn’t go far, and there’s a faint *beep* before the thermometer is removed as quickly as it arrived.

“What does it say?” Will asks. It’s a stupid question. He has no idea what temperature is normal or not, has no idea, even, what a degree is. The shame that comes from his ignorance is always present in the back of his mind, but now that awful feeling has been dragged to the

forefront, exposed like a stripped wire, and Will can't do anything but let the shame spark along his body and land in his stomach.

"It reads 99.3. A little higher than normal, but nothing to be concerned about." Hannibal's voice is light, but his eyes are dark. Tight. Will thinks he might be lying. "We can check it again tomorrow and see if it's the same."

Will sighs, not looking forward to another day of poking and prodding, but he keeps his complaints inside. Despite the manner in which they met, Will has never been treated better than the past few days spent in Hannibal's house. Even this examination is a kindness Will has never experienced before. No one has ever cared enough to check and see if he's healthy.

No one until Hannibal.

"What's next?" Will asks, dreading the answer. Hannibal had mentioned taking his "vitals" but Will has no idea what that means or what it might entail. He hopes it's not something that needs much participation.

"Your blood pressure next. Would you please sit in the armchair? Keep your legs uncrossed and both feet flat on the floor."

Will sits on the chair, nearly jumping at the sudden feel of cool leather against his bare thighs. Hannibal pretends not to notice, putting the thermometer back into the tub and bringing out a strange-looking device that consists of a rubber tube, some velcro, and what looks like a watch. Hannibal wraps the velcro around Will's upper arm, fingers skimming lightly over Will's skin. Will wishes, for a moment, that Hannibal wasn't wearing any gloves. That Will could feel the man's smooth fingertips brushing over his skin without a drop of hesitance, sure and strong and everything that Will wasn't.

"I'm going to tighten the cuff. I apologize in advance for the pressure."

Will nods and is proud of himself for not startling when the velcro near his shoulder suddenly tightens. Hannibal squeezes a ball to increase the pressure, and Will listens to the *whoosh* of the cuff as it gets tighter and tighter. Finally, when the velcro seems so tight against his skin that Will wouldn't be surprised if it ended up permanently embedded into his shoulder, Hannibal glances at the glass dial with the numbers for a moment before releasing the cuff with a flick of his wrist.

Again, Will senses the man's disappointment. It's subtle, but there. Perhaps to any other person, Hannibal might look completely relaxed, but to Will it seems as though the man is screaming his displeasure out loud with each pore of his face, from the lines around his eyes to the minute way his lips tilt downwards.

Will tenses, feeling as though he is failing a test he didn't even know he was taking. He supposes that's why this is called an examination.

Hannibal puts away the cuff and brings out a scale. This, at least, Will is familiar with. His father had owned one at some point in time, keeping it tucked away in the bathroom of his trailer without ever using it, too preoccupied with his liquor than what it was doing with his

body. The scale had been made of plastic, old and yellowed with time, and Will can't remember what eventually became of it. Perhaps it is still sitting there in his father's trailer, waiting to be discovered in the distant future when the trailer is more swamp than metal.

Will steps onto the scale without being prompted, and for the third time, Hannibal is disappointed in the *54* that flashes in blue LED lights across the glass screen. Hannibal is silent as he picks up the scale and puts it back into the bucket, and Will feels himself break.

"I'm sorry," he whispers. He hunches his shoulders in and bends his knees, trying to make himself into as small a target as possible. "I don't…I don't know what I did wrong, but I'm sorry." Tears burn behind Will's eyes, but he refuses to let them fall. He swallows the lump in his throat and forces it back into his stomach.

Hannibal, whose back is turned to Will, immediately stiffens at the sound of his broken voice. He slowly turns to face Will, but Will can't look him in the eye, can't stand to see the disappointment that's surely there, can't bear to see one more person realize how pathetic Will is, how much trouble he is, how little he is able to do, can't watch as Hannibal's decision to keep Will slowly turns into a hatred for being trapped with such an utterly *worthless* human being—

"Will, why are you apologizing?" Hannibal's voice is void of any emotion except concern, and Will can't *stand* it. Why is Hannibal being so nice when Will is obviously doing something wrong?

"Because you're disappointed!" Will shouts. He untucks his arms and gestures to the buckets with sweeping motions, completely aware of how ridiculous he looks standing there in nothing but his underwear and socks. "Every time the numbers come back, you look disappointed. Your mouth gets all pinched and your eyes darken, and I can't *stand* it." Will realizes his control over his tears has once again been broken. They feel so warm against his chilled face, almost like feathered kisses across his cheeks. Or at least how Will imagines getting kissed feels like.

Hannibal's expression changes, and Will manages to catch a glimpse of something before it is quickly hidden behind Hannibal's ever-present mask.

It looked like pity.

"I apologize for the miscommunication. Let me assure you, Will, that you have done absolutely nothing wrong. Not today, not yesterday, not at any point since you have come into my possession." Hannibal's eyes are nearly black by the time he says *possession*. Will wonders if that's what he is. Possessed by Hannibal. He supposes there are worse things to be. "I am disappointed—not by you—but by the lack of care shown to you throughout your life. You are severely underweight for a boy your age, and your blood pressure is also astonishingly low, likely due to malnutrition. I wish…" Hannibal pauses, clenches his hands into fists by his sides, and then almost immediately relaxes them so that they rest flat against his upper thighs. "I wish for you to be healthy. Do you understand that?"

Will allows himself another quick glance into Hannibal's eyes. There is no lie to be found there, only an earnest honesty that seems almost violent in its intensity.

“I understand.”

“I knew you would. Such a clever boy.”

Will blushes and squirms, tamping down the whine that rises in the back of his throat.

“Right now, I need to finish our exam. I’m sorry again for any discomfort that this will cause you; it is wholly unintended on my part. After we finish, you are welcome to put your clothing back on, and I would like for you to help me in preparing our dinner. Does that sound acceptable to you?”

Hannibal has apologized to Will more times in the past hour than Will has been apologized to in his entire life combined. It seems almost contradictory to Will. Hannibal is not one for idle apologies, anyone with functioning eyes can see that, and yet here he is asking–begging–Will for forgiveness when there is none to give because there was no harm in the first place.

“That sounds okay to me.” Will makes sure his eyes are dry before nodding at Hannibal to continue. “Let’s get this over with.”

“A perfectly reasonable request.”

The next thirty minutes are spent in relative silence. The exam resumes with Hannibal’s warm hands pressed to his neck, then under his armpits. Hannibal brings out another device —a stethoscope, Will learns—and listens to Will’s heart and lungs. Hannibal flashes Will one more apologetic glance before sliding a needle into the crook of his arm. Will watches with wonder as dark red blood gushes into the empty vial attached to the end of the needle. He is even more surprised at how tiny the hole is that’s left behind. The blood rushing from his body had seemed eager to leave; Will thought there would be more of a mark left behind from such a hasty exit.

“There, we are finished. You can get dressed while I put the supplies back into the car.”

Will nearly trips over his own feet in his haste to grab his jeans and sweater. Though the items of clothing are brand new, they bring Will more comfort than anything he’s ever worn in the past. Even the jeans feel like a second skin once slipped onto his thighs, and Will wonders how he ever survived with simply wearing whatever clothes were left in dumpsters or donation boxes on the outskirts of New Orleans.

Hannibal comes back from the garage and gives Will a gentle smile. “I hope you still have an appetite. We are having warm cod salad with tarragon sauce and poached eggs.”

Will nods as if he understands any of what Hannibal just said and follows the man into the kitchen. The countertops are spotless as always, the island in the center of the kitchen gleaming under the overhead lights. Hannibal goes to the fridge and grabs a handful of different ingredients, including the fish that they bought from the grocery store yesterday.

“Would you be comfortable chopping the herbs while I set the *kombu* to boil?”

“I’ve never chopped herbs before,” Will says, before quickly adding, “but I’ve prepared plenty of fish. That includes gutting them, too.” He isn’t sure why he’s trying to impress Hannibal when there is nothing for the older man to be impressed about, but Hannibal—polite as always—gives Will a warm look that sends curling flames of heat all the way into Will’s toes.

“Then you are more prepared than most guests that have entered my home. I trust you with this task.”

Will feels he should be surprised that Hannibal is trusting him with a task that involves using a knife, but really, what would Will do with it? Hannibal is so much stronger, so much faster, so clearly a predator while Will merely scrambles to survive. If Will even attempted to lunge at Hannibal, try and cut him, Will would end up pinned to the counter in an instant (or shoved to the ground, the blade turned and impaled into his own heart, and Will doesn't understand why that image makes his blood race with more excitement than fear). But Will has no desire to hurt Hannibal. Something which Hannibal must know, or else he wouldn't be giving Will access to a knife. “I would like to learn.”

“Perfect,” Hannibal purrs. He sets down a few tied bundles of herbs, each emitting a unique scent. “Let us start with the tarragon, then.” Hannibal unties one of the bundles, grabs a cutting board from underneath the counter, then places them both in front of Will. After, Hannibal goes to the knife block sitting next to the pantry doors and selects a sharp, straight-edged knife that shines brightly in the kitchen lights. The knife is completely different from the one Will used back in Louisianna to prepare his catches; that blade had been a mostly-dull pocket knife that Will had slipped into his pocket while walking through a convenience store, his father completely oblivious as he spent their last few dollars on another pack of cigarettes.

“Are you sure you want me to do this?” Will asks, gesturing to the knife. “I really don’t know the right way to cut herbs. Gutting fish is easy; you just stick them with the sharp end and leave the bones behind. It's hard to mess up.”

Hannibal sadly shakes his head at the comment, disheartened by Will's (abysmal) self-confidence, yet undeterred regardless. “If you are so uncertain of the proper techinique, then I shall just have to help you through the motions.”

Will is about to ask what, exactly, *helping him through the motions* means when Hannibal gestures for Will to turn and face the cutting board. Hannibal takes a few steps forward, stands directly behind Will, the kitchen knife still gleaming in his left hand. Will freezes as Hannibal places the handle of the knife into the fleshy center of Will’s palm, then places his own hand on top of Will’s, large fingers covering Will's completely as he guides both of their hands to the cutting board. Will’s entire back is on fire, every inch of his body that is connected to Hannibal's flaring up like a small blaze that smolders and burns along his skin.

“The trick,” Hannibal says into his ear, “is how much pressure to apply.”

Will watches with hazy eyes as Hannibal begins rocking the blade over the herbs, back and forth in a see-saw motion. Hannibal’s other arm curls over Will’s shoulder to grab another bundle of herbs. Will is completely enveloped now, his entire being focused on Hannibal’s body, his scent, the way his breath puffs into Will’s ear with each spoken word.

“Just like that,” Hannibal says, nearly a whisper. “Such a clever boy. I knew you would learn so quickly.”

Will’s brain feels like it’s floating, completely drifting from the rest of his body and settling somewhere high in the clouds. He watches as though through a fogged lens as Hannibal continues to rock the knife back and forth, his hand hot and steady over Will’s own. Will can’t help but tilt his head back against Hannibal’s solid chest, letting his body go lax under the extended touch. His heart rate has skyrocketed from this simple motion as though he were lifting an anchor rather than a knife. There isn't enough air in the room, and each breath Will sucks in feels thinner than the last. His lungs burn from the lack of oxygen (from the lack of space between him and Hannibal).

“We’re almost done. You’re doing so well, Will.”

“Hannibal…” Will breathes out, letting his lashes flutter closed for an instant. He can’t pay attention to the lesson, too focused on the prickling sensation under his skin that feels like a thousand moths fluttering their wings. He imagines the moths bursting out of his chest and fluttering around the kitchen before landing on his cheeks with feathery soft kisses, caressing his cheeks the same way as Hannibal’s breath caresses his ear.

“Yes, Will?”

Oh god, Will nearly cries at the feel of Hannibal’s voice rumbling low in his chest, vibrating against the back of Will’s neck. He can’t remember asking Hannibal a question, can’t remember his own name, can’t remember anything except the consistent rocking of the knife back and forth and back and forth again until everything jumbles in his brain and he feels close to bursting.

“There, all finished.”

As swiftly as he arrived, Hannibal steps away from Will’s body, and Will wants to scream at the loss. He feels cold and shuddery all over, his skin too small and his hands too large and everything too much.

Will takes in a deep breath, allowing the pungent flavor of the herbs to calm him down so that his heart isn’t bursting from inside his ribs. Eventually, he sets down the knife that Hannibal had left in his hands and turns around to face the man.

Hannibal looks…deranged, almost, his own chest rising and falling faster than normal, his eyes shrouded in shadows that spill over his sharp cheekbones and throw darkness over his plush lips. His hands rest—almost painfully casual—at his sides. His stance is predatory, muscles tensed and flexing in his thighs, as if he is about to lunge at Will, pin him against the counter and then sink his sharp canines into the delicate flesh of Will's exposed neck.

Will would let him.

“What’s next?” Will asks. His voice sounds like he had just gargled on salt water for the past hour, gravelly and in a far lower register than normal. Will hopes that Hannibal won't notice, but the thought is immediately discarded as soon as it appears; of course Hannibal will

notice. How could he not, with the way he is practically melding himself into Will's space, soaking up every sound Will makes, every shift in his body, the very speed at which blood is pumping thrumming in his veins.

Hannibal clears his throat, his eyes darting down to Will's lips for an instant before rising back to meet his eyes. "The *kombu*, I believe. I'll go and fetch it from the pantry."

Will nods and turns back around, the herbs a much safer place to look than Hannibal's face, his eyes, his *lips*. Will wonders, for the second time that evening, whether he was going to survive the night.

Taking a Break

Chapter Summary

Will and Hannibal have a picnic.

It's pathetic, really, how easy it is for Hannibal to place the vial of Will's blood into the blood lab and receive the test results. A few misplaced labels, an ID card slipped from a careless technician's outer pocket, and a trip to the printer are all it takes for Hannibal to learn that Will is even more malnutritioned than he had feared. Hannibal had wondered —from the moment he saw Will standing in front of his car lights—just how a boy living exposed to the elements in the deep South could have such pale skin. Now he knows that Will's anemia is the worst Hannibal has ever seen; Hannibal is sure there are corpses he's met with better iron levels. All the other markers for malnutrition are spelled out in unfeeling black ink splashed across the crisp white page, Will's very being reduced down to a few lines of letters and numbers.

"Dr. Lecter, there's a patient needing your attention in room 605."

Hannibal glances down at his pager and, yes, there is the notification. He sighs, thanks the nurse who was sent to fetch him, and gets up from the plastic chair he had been reading in. As he makes his way to the operating room, Will's paperwork—folded and tucked into his back pocket—burns a hole in the white fabric of his lab coat so that each step Hannibal takes is painfully hot and impossible to ignore.

Inside the operating room, the overhead light has been flicked on, and it glares down with unfeeling accuracy at the body spread out on the table like a slab of meat. "Has he been prepped?" Hannibal asks with a monotone voice, snapping on a pair of nitrile gloves and reaching for a new mask. There are four other people in the room with him, and only one of them is even halfway competent. Hannibal has to tamp down the frustration that wells up inside of him that he is stuck here instead of at home with Will.

"Yes, doctor. He was brought in a little over thirty minutes ago. Myocardial infarction. Ambulance picked him up from work. Paramedics gave him an ECG on the way over and found atherosclerosis throughout the aortic arch."

Hannibal looks down at the man. His chest is uncovered, exposed to the cool air, and the entire left side has been shaved of any chest hair. His nipples, nearly purple in the blue operating lights, perk up at the exposure.

Hannibal rolls his shoulders once, twice, before saying, "Let us start." He reaches for a scalpel sitting on a small rolling table next to the body, lifting it into his hand with

practiced ease and cutting a thin line into the large man.

A few minutes into the surgery, Hannibal knows that something is wrong. The man's blood pressure suddenly drops, his heart stops beating beneath Hannibal's scalpel, and the monitor in the room begins to scream. All three nurses and the surgical technician begin frantically moving around, attempting to restart the silent heart. None of their efforts work, and Hannibal puts down his scalpel and places the heart into his palm, massaging it with both hands.

It still refuses to beat.

After a moment of silence—broken only by the still-screeching monitor—Hannibal looks up at the clock on the wall and calls the time of death.

For the first time in his career, Hannibal has lost a patient on the table. He supposes he should feel some shame in breaking his implacable record of success, but the only emotion that wells up inside of him while he removes his blood-soaked clothing is relief. He can use this opportunity like the gift it is to take time off from work and spend his days with Will. Images of him reading to Will, teaching Will to cook, showing Will all sorts of delights and pleasures that he's never experienced before race through Hannibal's mind.

"Doctor, are you alright?"

Hannibal takes off his mask, breathing in the scent of copper and fear. He holds back the smile that threatens to spill onto his uncovered face. "I am fine, thank you. I think I shall take the rest of the day off." And the rest of the month, if things go according to plan.

The nurse bites her lip and eyes Hannibal like one might eye a choice cut of meat. Hannibal abhors the feeling and makes a mental note to never be left in the same room as her again. If he is forced to associate with such an unpalatable assistant, he will be forced to ask for her business card, and he tries to not mix work and pleasure whenever possible.

"Of course," she simpers. "I'll let the others know."

Hannibal nods his head in false gratitude and leaves the room as quickly as possible, reaching his car in only a few minutes and immediately pulling out of the parking garage and onto the street. He stops at a nearby bakery before going home, picking up a fresh loaf of bread, some almond cookies, and an apple tart he is sure Will is going to enjoy. As Hannibal has cooked and baked for the boy this past week, he's come to realize that while Will will eat anything–and Hannibal knows this is not simply from a lack of preferences but an engrained lack of choice in the past that taught Will the value of edible food in any form when it is presented–he seems to have a hidden sweet tooth that Hannibal is desperate to tease out.

When Hannibal unloads his car and goes inside, he finds Will not in the guest room but pacing back and forth from the kitchen, to the dining room, to the living room and back

again. From the slight sheen of sweat glistening on Will's forehead, the boy has been walking this same path for some time now.

"Will," Hannibal asks, wanting to shower and put away the groceries but needing to check on his boy, "why are you pacing the house?"

Will jumps, so clearly lost in thought that he hadn't heard Hannibal open the garage door and walk inside. He tugs on one of his ears as if that will stop the flush of embarrassment that tinges them pink. "You're home early."

"I am." Hannibal says, looking at Will and waiting.

Will stares at Hannibal's chin for a moment before sighing. As his breath leaves his body, so to does the tension. His shoulders slump and his arms come to rest at his sides. "I uh…it's fine. I'm fine."

"I have no doubt that you think you are fine. However, for my sake, I must insist on knowing why you are walking in circles downstairs."

Will frowns and flexes his toes. Ah, so Hannibal was right. The gesture is a nervous habit rather than Will simply enjoying his new socks. "I don't want to sound ungrateful…" Will begins, then stops. Hannibal, who feels no awkwardness when confronted with silence, allows the pause to extend until Will begins speaking again. "It's just, I'm so used to spending the entire day outside. The whole night, too. And now I'm here, inside your house all day. And I don't want to complain or anything, but I feel so restless, and I'm not sure how to make it stop. So, the pacing."

Hannibal frowns at his own thoughtlessness. "I apologize deeply, Will. I should have known that such a transition from being mostly outside to exclusively indoors would cause agitation. Please, allow me to remedy it by taking you on a picnic. I need to shower and prepare some food, but if you will give me a half hour I promise you will enjoy our outing."

Will's eyes narrow, unsure. "A picnic? I've…never had a picnic before."

Hannibal allows all his teeth to show when he grins. "I have a feeling there are many things you haven't experienced before. It gives me no small delight to show them to you."

Will flushes and stares down at the ground. "Okay then. If you're sure. Do you need me to pack anything? I want to help, but I should probably leave any food prep to you."

Hannibal's heart flutters. He feels the urge to reach a hand under his own ribs and massage the organ until it beats with a proper rhythm. "I will never turn down your help. Why don't you go to the linen closet and find a blanket for us to sit on while we eat our meal. Then you can go change. I don't want you getting cold while we're outside."

Will smiles—a tiny, hidden thing—and Hannibal wants to rip the expression off the boy's face and devour it whole until it settles deep inside his stomach, warm and filling.

Hannibal wishes, suddenly, to do something every second of every day that would elicit such a smile in Will, with each day requiring a gesture more outlandish and grand than the last until only Hannibal carving open his chest to hand Will his bloody heart will inspire Will to grant him the same, small smile. Hannibal wants—

"Thank you," Will says. "I mean, for everything. Not just the picnic."

Hannibal cannot stop himself from saying, "One day, you will be so used to having me fulfill your every whim that the mere thought of saying thank you for anything will seem absurd."

Will positively *burns*, scent spiking with that embarrassment-pleasure combination of spices and honey that Hannibal immediately gulps down his throat, parched for the taste.

Hannibal allows the boy (himself, really) a reprieve by depositing the items from the bakery in the kitchen and going upstairs to shower. It seems as though the more time he spends with Will, the more his infamous self-control feels as though it will snap, until one day he might end up ravishing the boy against the kitchen counter instead of waiting for Will to come to him first.

Because that is what must happen. There is already an extreme power imbalance in their relationship—one that Hannibal has no plans on correcting—but for Will to be happy, he must make the first move to change their relationship into something more. If Hannibal were to take rather than wait for Will to give, there would always be a voice in the back of Will's mind that whispered that Hannibal was not what he truly wanted but Will had been too timid at the time to say no.

The shower is quick, perfunctory. Simply to remove the smells from the hospital that linger on Hannibal's skin and nothing more. After, Hannibal meticulously dries himself, starting with his dark brown hair and ending with his legs. He changes into a thin, pinstriped button-down, a pair of black slacks, and a set of hand-stitched oxford loafers that he bought from Mrs. Batas not long after moving to Baltimore. By the time he walks into the kitchen, Will is already there, dressed in a red plaid flannel shirt and jeans and drumming his fingers along the top of the chrome countertop.

"Is this alright?" Will asks, pointing to the blanket he had grabbed from the linen closet. He had selected an old, faded Afghan that Hannibal had used while attending boarding school in France. "They were all so nice. I don't know if we should take this one outside." Will uses his teeth to tug on his bottom lip, nearly opening up the chronic bite-marks that live on the surface of his skin. Hannibal wants to take his own teeth and bite down on the scabs until Will's blood flows into his mouth, fresh and unadulterated.

Another time, perhaps.

"That will be perfect for our outing. Thank you, Will."

Will's cheeks glow, and his face takes on a mischievous look. "One day, you are going to be so used to me helping you that you won't think to say 'thank you' anymore."

Warmth blossoms in Hannibal's chest. He is so happy that Will is starting to feel comfortable enough around him to allow some of his personality to shine through. There is such a difference between merely surviving from day to day instead of flourishing under the careful cultivation from one such as Hannibal. Will was going to blossom, and Hannibal would be there to see every moment of it and help him along, if necessary. "I look forward to the day. Until then, I suppose we both must get used to grateful platitudes, though I hope they are not empty."

Will's nose scrunches up, wrinkling the tiny smattering of freckles that cover the bridge of his nose and slope down to the tops of his cheeks. "I'm, uh, not sure what a platitude is, but I think I agree with what you're saying."

Hannibal turns to the fridge and begins gathering the food for their picnic. "Try to parse it out from the rest of what I said. The easiest way to learn a new word or language is to decipher context clues."

Will is silent while Hannibal grabs the loaf of bread he had picked up from the bakery along with a wedge of roquefort, a few slices of thigh meat from Mr. Graham, and a variety of fresh vegetables that would pair with the blue cheese. He also decides to take the apple tart, knowing the crisp sweetness in the tart would couple well with the sharp tang of the sandwich.

"I think it means a phrase," Will finally says. Hannibal glances across the counter, watching as Will picks at his fingernails. "Is that right?"

"Very good, Will. As I've said, you are an extremely clever boy. I have no doubt you would have excelled above your peers if you were given the chance at a proper education."

Will shakes his head, embarrassed. "I don't know about that."

"We are surrounded by swine, Will, but that does not make us livestock by association.

"That's what you thought my dad was. A pig."

Hannibal tilts his head, considering how much he should explain to Will now and how much he should simply show Will once they begin to hunt together. He settles on saying, "Almost every person is born lesser. Like your father. The ones who are born special, born different, are few and far between. You and I are some of those special few."

"Are there others?" Will asks. "Other people who aren't swine?"

Hannibal thinks of Mischa, of gentle hands and tender smiles and then of empty eyes and flesh torn from bone and served to him raw. "There are others, yes. But as I said, they are extremely rare. That's why you and I must stay together."

Hannibal reaches beneath the counter, opens up a cabinet, and pulls out a beautiful wicker basket, one of the only items in his current home that is native to Lithuania. It seems fitting to use, considering that he is providing for Will both physically and

emotionally and this basket represents both. The meals he provides for Will nourish his body, and the praise and attention he provides for Will nourish his soul.

Will tugs on the sleeve of his flannel shirt and moves to help Hannibal load the basket. Hannibal is careful to let his fingers lightly caress Will's hands as they move food from the countertop to the basket. It's important for Will to grow—not desensitized, exactly, because Hannibal always wants the boy to feel a thrill at the contact of their skin touching—but perhaps more familiar to his touch. Each time that Hannibal is able to brush his hand against Will's without the boy jumping or jerking away is a wonderful improvement in such a short amount of time.

He will always apologize for touching Will without his consent when the boy realizes what is happening, but for moments like this when Hannibal is careful to be *un*-careful in his touch, there's no need to draw attention to the contact.

When the basket is full of food, cutlery, and napkins, Hannibal folds the blanket on top as a kind of barrier and slips the basket onto the crux of his elbow. The basket is much too heavy for Will to carry in his current state. Hannibal plans to add blood into the majority of the boy's meals from now on to increase his iron, and with the other vitamins, minerals, and proteins now introduced to Will's body, he will continue to grow stronger every day until he finally reaches the appropriate muscle mass. Until then, Hannibal refuses to push the boy to work any more than is required to keep his body healthy. Will has already worked more in his twelve short years than most adults do in a lifetime.

"Where are we going to have our picnic?" Will asks once they are seated in the Bentley. Hannibal pulls out of the garage in one smooth motion, heading east.

"We are going to Canton Waterfront Park. It allows a view of the harbor without getting too close, and this time of day is particularly lovely if you are keen on boats as the city tours come and go most often during the lunch hour."

Will perks up at the word boat. "Oh, really? I like boats. My dad fixed boat motors more than any other kind, and I would help sometimes." Will glances at him from the corner of his eyes. "But you already knew that."

"I knew your father was a mechanic, yes." Hannibal pauses, then says, "He sold me a defunct motor."

Will nods his head, unsurprised. "At one point in time, he was one of the best mechanics in Louisiana. We'd go all over the place, and there was never any problem finding work. But then his drinking became worse, and…" Will sighs and looks out the car window. "Anyway, I'm sorry about that."

"It is not your burden to apologize for him. His wrongs are not your own."

Will nods again. "Is that why you killed him?" Will laughs, but it comes out choked and wet. "Because he sold you a boat motor that didn't work?"

“Is this really the conversation you want to be having right now?” Hannibal keeps his eyes focused on the front windshield, though he desperately wants to turn fully to see Will’s body, the unspoken words that come through his bent posture and misty eyes.

“We need to have it someday.”

“It has been less than a week, Will. Surely someday includes a longer window of time than that.”

Will taps his fingers along the dashboard. “I think I already know the answer, anyway.” He turns to face Hannibal, and Hannibal can’t resist the urge to turn and face Will, too. The boy’s eyes are bright, shining, neither sad nor defeated. He looks calm as he says, “It’s because my dad did something rude to you, wasn’t it? It wasn’t about the boat motor; you could have easily gotten a hundred more motors from a hundred different shops. It’s because my dad lied to you, sold you a broken motor, and then took your money anyway.”

Hannibal nearly slams on the brakes, overwhelmed by how easily Will sees him, knows him. Perhaps in time come to *accept* him as no other has and no other can. “How did you know?” Hannibal asks, his voice only slightly deeper than normal.

Will waves his hand at Hannibal, a sweeping gesture that encompasses Hannibal from his perfectly tailored hair down to his handmade shoes. “You’re always so polite. So put together. I’ve never met someone who was so…kind isn’t the right word. It’s more about the ceremony than the meaning behind it. You are polite to others and expect them to be the same. You can deal with a lot of things. You’re a doctor. But being rude? That is the one sin you don’t tolerate.”

“A perfect explanation. As always Will, you exceed my expectations far beyond what I could have possibly imagined.”

Will squirms in his seat, crossing and then uncrossing his skinny legs. “It’s something anyone could see.”

“And yet only you have seen it.”

Hannibal turns on his blinker and pulls into a small concrete area next to the harbor, parking the Bentley underneath a wrought-iron lamp post. He turns to Will and gestures outside, enamored by the excitement in Will’s face. “Shall we have our picnic, then?”

The park is better than what Will had imagined since Hannibal had described during their short fifteen-minute car ride. Will breathes in the scent of ocean water, salty and cleansing and exactly how he imagined the sea would smell. It was so different from the brackish, decaying smell of swamp water or the cool, refreshing smell of a stream. Will breathes in again, allowing himself to become a little lightheaded before turning to see if Hannibal needs any help carrying the basket.

“Why don’t you select a spot for us to have our picnic,” Hannibal says, pointing out to the sprawling greenery that ends abruptly in concrete steps that lead down to the harbor. Will practically vibrates with excitement, unsure whether to sit somewhere closer to the water or underneath a tree for shade. In the end, he chooses to sit next to a tree that’s perched up on a small hill so that he can still look out over the water while they eat.

“I’ve never smelled the ocean before,” Will says. He realizes too late how odd that sounds, but Hannibal only smiles and lays out the blanket, perfectly at ease.

“Cleansing, is it not?” Hannibal asks. He takes out their food and begins assembling two sandwiches. “Unfortunately, I haven’t made the time as of late to come and partake of its unique beauty. You help remind me of the things I’ve lost, Will.”

Will senses there is more truth to that statement than Hannibal simply reminiscing about the ocean. He isn’t sure how to reply, so instead he says, “If I lived as close to the harbor as you do, I don’t think I’d ever be able to leave.” He gazes out at the sea, calm and bright blue and dotted with boats of every shape and color imaginable.

Hannibal hands him a plate, the sandwich artfully presented along with a slice of something that smells of apples. Hannibal also hands him a fork, knife, and patterned cloth napkin. Will has never been on a picnic, but he’s sure they are not usually so carefully put together. Then again, nothing about Hannibal is usual, so why should their picnic be any different?

As Will takes the first bite of his sandwich, he’s unable to stop the pleased moan that escapes his mouth. It seems every taste bud on his tongue is being catered to, with sweet and salty and savory flavors all combining into a nearly overwhelming concoction that Will wants to sit on his tongue and never swallow. But he has to swallow, and it’s only the consolation that the next bite is sure to taste just as good as the last that keeps him from feeling sad. It’s not until Will is almost completely done with his food that he realizes that Hannibal has yet to take a single bite. Is Will doing something wrong? Is there some sort of picnic procedure he’s not aware of that Hannibal is waiting to take place?

Will swallows his last bite of sandwich and sets his plate down onto the blanket. “Is everything okay?”

Hannibal, eyes nearly black, stares at Will’s lips. Will blushes and wipes his mouth with his napkin. He probably was eating like a slob and Hannibal could only watch in horror as his carefully crafted sandwich was downed in a matter of seconds like a pig slopping up scraps. Will allows himself another glance at Hannibal’s eyes.

It’s not disgust he sees.

It’s desire, thick and heady and so overwhelming that Will barely holds back the gasp that wants to tumble from his throat. He snaps his eyes back down to Hannibal’s chin, trying to keep the red from his face and utterly failing.

The way Hannibal looks at Will, like he wants to *eat Will alive* and then *demand seconds*. Will shudders and picks up his plate just so his hands have something to do besides reach for the man in front of him.

“I apologize, Will. I was merely taking in the view.” Hannibal, all politeness and fake calm, reaches for his own plate and takes a small bite of his sandwich. His eyes are still on Will, watching as Will reaches for his fork and spears a piece of what looks like a fancy type of pie.

“What is this?” Will asks, nostrils flooding with the scent of baked apples and cinnamon.

“An apple tart. I have high hopes that it will be to your liking.”

Will snorts. “There hasn’t been anything you’ve fed me so far that I haven’t liked.”

“You spoil me, Will.”

Will flushes a deeper red, his face no doubt a shade of maroon that matches Hannibal’s eyes, and shoves the apple tart into his mouth. It blossoms on his tongue, different from the sandwich but no less deserving of praise. This time, Will is able to keep the contented moan inside of him.

They finish their food in silence, and Will watches the boats come and go from the nearby pier, some loading up with people, others unloading fish and equipment. There’s a serenity in the constant movement, an order in the chaos. Will keeps watching until his eyes start to droop with tiredness. His body has been trained to associate a full stomach with sleep. In the past, if Will had eaten, that usually meant he was somewhere safe, somewhere he could fall asleep without the threat of harm. He doesn’t know if he will ever grow out of the habit, or if every meal Hannibal serves him will inevitably lead to him falling asleep.

“Rest, Will.” Hannibal gestures to the blanket. “We are not in any rush.”

“Don’t you have to get back to work?” Will asks, voice slow and languid, eyelids fluttering shut.

“Not today. I have decided to take some time off work for a short while.”

Will nods, yawns, and lays down on the sun-warmed blanket, curling up into a ball and using his folded hands as a pillow. It seems only an instant before he’s fast asleep.

When Will wakes, the sun has shifted from shining directly overhead to hovering near the western horizon, spilling beams of light between the thick foliage of the tree overhead so that the blanket—including Hannibal and Will—are surrounded by strange shapes and leaf-shaped shadows.

“Welcome back,” Hannibal says, voice smooth and dry.

Will shifts so that he's sitting up, back propped against the trunk of the tree. Hannibal is laying on the blanket, resting on his side, hands moving over a sketchbook that's magically appeared in front of him. Hannibal makes no move to hide the paper, and Will can clearly see that it's himself Hannibal is drawing. His drawn body is fast asleep and a near carbon-copy of how Will was posed only moments before. The accuracy is incredible, from the curls in his hair down to the wrinkles in his flannel shirt.

Will blushes and turns his eyes elsewhere. "Are you ready to go?"

"Not quite." Hannibal shifts, and Will sees out of the corner of his eye the muscles rippling in the man's arms and stomach as he sits up and stretches. His arms are thick and solid, muscle wrapping around bone like corded steel. Will clears his throat and shifts, unsure why he suddenly feels so hot all over.

"Is there something else you want to do?" Will asks.

Hannibal places his sketchbook into their picnic basket and moves so that he's sitting close to Will without touching him. He smells of sunshine and seawater, a heady combination, and Will wants to close his eyes and rest against Hannibal's solid, warm shoulder.

"As a matter of fact, there is," Hannibal replies. His voice rumbles next to Will's ear. "I would like to try another lesson today for your empathy. Is that something you would be amenable to?"

Amenable. Another word that Will has no idea the meaning of. He wonders if his vocabulary is really that lacking or if Hannibal just uses words that his father and teachers never cared to use or explain to him. Will thinks it's probably the second option. "Sure. We can have another lesson."

"Excellent." Hannibal puts a hand over his eyes and peers out at the park, searching for something. Will follows his line of sight until they are both staring at a woman who is seated on one of the park benches. "I would like for you to empathize with her. Do you need to get closer? I am still unsure of the parameters of your ability."

Will snorts. "You and me both. No, I think I'll be okay from here." Will stares at the woman, taking in her posture, the way her spine rests languidly against the back of the wooden bench, the quiet restlessness of her feet as they shuffle back and forth over grass, the way her eyes dart back and forth throughout the park, searching and seeking but not finding.

Hannibal remains quiet throughout the entire observation, for which Will is extremely grateful for. So many times, Will has been looking at someone or something and his concentration has been broken by a grating voice exclaiming, *what do you see, freak? You gonna tell me all my secrets? When will you learn to keep your mouth shut? No one likes what you can do. You should just cut out your eyes and save us all the trouble, faggot.*

Will takes a deep breath through his nose, allowing the scent of Hannibal—calm, collected, delicious—to fill his senses. "I…I'm ready."

"Take all the time you need, Will. And if you cannot see anything, we will try again a different time."

"No, I see her. She's…having an affair." Will allows his own posture to slump, mimicking the woman's. "They were supposed to be here already, but she's not worried. They've been late before." Will watches the woman tuck a strand of hair behind her ear and does the same to his own, surprised at the silky texture of his curls; it's incredible what access to shampoo and a regular shower can do to his hair. "She is…excited? No, *content*, when she is with her lover." Will notices the expensive watch on the woman's wrist, the wedding ring that shines proudly in the evening sun. "She still loves her spouse; they provide for her. But they don't give her the sense of peace that her lover does."

Will falls back against the tree, retreating into himself, and hazards a glance at Hannibal. He is entirely focused on Will, eyes boring a hole into Will's skull as if he could pry it open and see the empathy there like tiny mirrors reflecting out into the world.

"Incredible," Hannibal says. "You truly are singular."

Will blushes and bites on his bottom lip, comforted by the tang of blood that bursts onto his tongue. "I'm sure lots of people could see those things. You just have to look at what's there."

Hannibal shakes his head. "You must remember that others are swine. They do not look. They choose not to look, either out of stubbornness or a lack of curiosity. Your lesson today is to remember that what you do by choosing to look is a rare gift. You have a remarkably vivid imagination. Do not let it be squandered by listening to the swine."

Will sighs and tugs on one of his ears. "Yeah, okay. I'll try."

"That is all I can ask."

Hannibal gets up and grabs the picnic basket. Will stands as well, immediately reaching out to hold onto the tree trunk as his brain goes fuzzy and his legs suddenly feel as though they'll snap in half under his meager weight. His hand, covered in sweat, slips from off the rough tree bark, and it's only because Hannibal is there to catch him that he doesn't go tumbling to the ground.

Hannibal places one arm underneath Will's knees and wraps the other around his waist, effortlessly lifting him from where he was falling until he's held tightly against Hannibal's chest. Hannibal's breath is even against Will's ear, his heart a steady *thump thump* that reminds Will of the sound of the waves lapping against the harbor only a short distance away. Hannibal's whole body seems to radiate heat, and it makes Will want to push himself *into* Hannibal's body rather than away.

"Are you alright?" Hannibal murmurs, voice low and soft in Will's ear.

“I think so.” Will sets one trembling leg on the ground, and when that leg doesn’t buckle under his weight, he drops his other leg from Hannibal’s hold until he’s standing on his own. It’s so much colder, standing alone.

Will doesn’t like it.

Hannibal takes another step back. “I apologize for touching you without your consent, but I worried you might hit your head. Let me pack up the rest of our belongings, then we can return home.”

Will can’t respond, too surprised that Hannibal called the basket and blanket “our belongings” as if Will has any claim over them. Will has never owned anything in his life except what he stole or borrowed from others. And yes, Hannibal has bought Will clothing and toiletries (which Will still feels are far too nice for him to use), but the basket and blanket are clearly both old and well-loved, and for Hannibal to offer joint-ownership over those things so casually is…hard for Will to understand.

“Are you ready?” Hannibal asks, looking down at Will with a smooth face. His cheekbones look chiseled from stone, but Will knows from firsthand experience just how warm Hannibal’s skin is, so different from cold, unfeeling marble.

“Yes, we can go.”

Once they are in the car and driving away, Hannibal clears his throat and asks, “If you recall from a previous conversation, I am arranging with my uncle to have you added to the Lecter household. In order to accomplish this, I need to give him your birth certificate. Since you do not currently have one, and because you do not know your birthday, it seems as though you have the unique opportunity of deciding the date of your birth yourself.”

Will stares out the window, watching the tourist-filled buildings surrounding the harbor turn to sky rises and then finally fancy, unnaturally well-maintained brownstone homes. Eventually he asks, “What was the date you found me?”

Hannibal tilts his head but otherwise doesn’t react to the sudden change in subject. “I believe it was the 29th of September.”

Will nods and continues looking out the window. “Make that my birthday, then.”

Hannibal hums, assenting. “The 29th it is. Happy late birthday, Will.”

Will stifles the giggle that wants to burst from his lips, muffling it with the back of his hand. He knows Hannibal is manipulating him, keeping him happy and pliant so that he doesn’t try to leave and Hannibal can continue to peer inside his head, but if the manipulation ends with Will having clothes over his back and good food in his belly and a *birthday* to celebrate then really, is it so bad to just let go and submit? Will can’t find it in himself to care. He’s so *tired* of being alone, of struggling to survive, of waking up each morning wishing he were dead but too cowardly to go through with taking the initiative to end his own life. He doesn’t want to fight anymore.

So he doesn’t.

He lets Hannibal cook him dinner. He lets Hannibal bring out dozens of new clothing items to try on, each one fitting his body to perfection (Will has the feeling that him trying on the clothing is more for Hannibal’s viewing pleasure than actually to see if the clothing is the right size). He watches with trepidation as Hannibal brings out the thermometer and takes his temperature again.

“Same as yesterday,” Hannibal remarks, giving Will a sly look. “You must just run slightly hotter than the average person.”

Will rolls his eyes and reaches for the last slice of apple tart sitting on the tray in the living room, too full and yet unable to keep himself from eating any and all food that presents itself to him, so used to grabbing whatever food he could whenever the opportunity presented itself.

And that night, when he lies in bed and smells the scent of clean sheets mixed with the goat’s milk soap he used during his shower, Will focuses on the heat that builds in his stomach and threatens to spill out, all of it centered and revolving around *Hannibal*. And if he finally falls asleep with a smile on his face knowing that Hannibal will be there in the morning instead of his father, well, who is there to know but himself?

Sudden Fever

Chapter Summary

Will and Hannibal settle into a routine.

Bach's *Goldberg Variations* pours out from the speakers installed in Hannibal's kitchen, soothing and evocative at the same time. Hannibal chops his ingredients to the rhythm of the music, timing his knife so that it snaps against the wooden cutting board at the same moment the music swells.

Once the ingredients for the protein scramble are prepared, Hannibal places them into a pre-oiled cast-iron skillet, careful not to over-mix the eggs. Above the sound of piano, Hannibal hears his phone buzzing on the countertop. He sighs, pauses the music, and wipes his hands (unnecessarily) onto his crisp apron.

The number on the phone is familiar, though not one he has seen flash onto his phone screen in many months, perhaps even years.

"Hello?" Hannibal asks, bringing the phone to his ear.

"I hear you have a son."

Hannibal stirs the now-finished protein scramble and leans into his phone. "Chiyoh, it is good to hear from you too."

"I do not wish to be toyed with, Hannibal. I'm not one of your little projects. What are you thinking? You've never been inclined to fatherhood."

The words *not since Mischa* remain unspoken.

"Will is mine, yes, but he is not my son. I do not think of him that way." Hannibal puts the call on speakerphone and fetches two plates from the cabinet, bringing them back to the stove and plating the protein scramble so that it sits in a neat mound on each dish. Hannibal makes sure to pour extra blood sauce on top of Will's serving, remembering how the boy nearly fainted yesterday during their picnic.

"Then how do you think of him, if not a son?"

Hannibal sighs again and sprinkles some freshly cut parsley on top of each mound, completing the meal. "He is…special to me. I think of him as a companion." *The perfect companion*.

Chiyoh hums into the phone. “Well, your *companion* is now officially Will Lecter. Congratulations.”

Hannibal allows himself a wide, unfiltered smile, feeling a lightness that has not resided in his heart for many, many years. Will is his. Officially, unequivocally his. And there is nothing anyone or anything can do to take his precious boy from him.

“Excellent,” Hannibal says, voice mild.

Chiyoh is not so easily fooled. She sees through his carefully constructed person suit, parsing out the real emotions from the false, allowing Hannibal’s second skin to be shed like a snake. “Yes, I suppose it is. I expect to meet him some day, you know.”

“I would have it no other way. He is a member of our family now.”

Chiyoh pauses. “You should bring him to France sooner rather than later if you wish for him to meet your uncle.”

Hannibal picks up his phone and takes it off of the speaker setting, pressing the device tightly to his ear. “He is ill, then?”

“The doctor thinks he has a few months left at best. Your aunt is beside herself.”

Hannibal scoffs. “I’m sure she is.” Pictures of Lady Murasaki, all elegant grace and silver tongue, come to the forefront of Hannibal’s mind. “I suppose a trip can be arranged now that Will’s paperwork is in order. Let me think on it. He is still not well enough to make the trip, and I fear his road to recovery might be longer than I expected.”

“Not well enough? What did you do to the boy?”

Hannibal feels his lips pull back into a snarl. He smooths out the expression before replying, “Nothing except bring him home. His deceased father, on the other hand, decided a more… hands-off approach to parenting would be best. Will has lived on his own for almost two years now.”

Chiyoh is silent on the other end. Hannibal steadies the phone with his shoulder and picks up his and Will’s plates, bringing them into the dining room and placing them side by side. They look right, sitting together. So much better than Hannibal’s plate sitting alone, another meal prepared for one. Enjoyed by one. Meals are so much more enjoyable with Will there at his side.

“I must go and wake Will for breakfast. Thank you for the call, Chiyoh. I hope it won’t be too long before I hear from you again, whatever the occasion.”

“Take care, Hannibal. I look forward to meeting your Will.”

My Will. Hannibal likes the sound of those two words together, perhaps more than is healthy.

He hangs up the phone, pockets it, and heads upstairs to fetch his boy. He opens the door to the guest room without a sound which allows him to look upon Will for a moment without

interruption. The boy is as beautiful in sleep as ever, curly hair sprawled over the pillowcase, pale skin glistening with sweat, shirt rucked up and exposing skin that stretches too thinly over his protruding ribs and hollow abdomen. Hannibal sighs, wishing he could paint the scene from life, instead saving the image in his Mind Palace to draw upon as inspiration for later.

"Will," he murmurs, walking over to stand next to the bed. Will's sweat has soaked through the comforter, filling it with the smell of fevered sweetness, like a dessert wine that's been left out for too long. "Will, I prepared us some breakfast."

Will groans, head turning away from the sudden noise (away from Hannibal). Hannibal frowns and reaches out a hand to trace over Will's exposed throat, gently caressing his hyoid bone before following the line of his jugular vein all the way down to his clavicle. The skin is wet beneath his fingertips, and Hannibal lifts them to his mouth to suck the sweat now coating his skin, enamored with the flavor. Hannibal is instantly addicted and reaches his hand down once more, stroking another line, this time across Will's forehead.

Will sighs and relaxes underneath Hannibal's touch, and Hannibal purrs low in his throat at the reaction. It seems his conditioning has paid off, at least subconsciously. Will now associates Hannibal's touch with safety.

"The food is getting cold," Hannibal says. "And after breakfast, I was hoping we could go on a walk around the harbor."

That seems to excite Will enough to start the process of waking up. Still, Will sighs once more before opening his eyes and squinting up at Hannibal. "Di' you say walk," he mumbles, voice slow and syrupy.

"Yes, Mylimasis. But first, breakfast." Hannibal reaches out one of his hands and offers it to Will, knowing the boy is likely to be dizzy headed after being woken from such a deep sleep (Hannibal recognizes that this, too, is a sign that Will feels safe around him, and it awakens a predatory, possessive instinct inside his chest that he has no thoughts of suppressing).

Will looks confused, though whether from Hannibal's term of endearment or outstretched hand, he cannot tell. Will eventually takes the proffered hand and heaves himself out of bed, stumbling into Hannibal and allowing more of that delicious, fever-sweet scent to spread onto Hannibal's tailored suit. Hannibal thinks he might never wash it again.

"Sorry," Will mumbles, still half-asleep.

"No worries, Mylimasis. Go get changed. I'll wait for you in the dining room."

Hannibal, once he is certain Will is steady on his feet, goes to the dining room to wait. It is only a few minutes before Will joins him, but the minutes stretch an eternity, each second away from his boy a second wasted.

Will has changed into a pair of jeans, a fresh undershirt, and a blue plaid flannel to go overtop —the boy must prefer wearing flannel, and Hannibal is nothing if not accommodating, which

means as soon as breakfast is finished, Hannibal will order another batch of tailored flannels to be made before the end of the week.

“You’re not working again today?” Will asks once he’s finished eating. Eating with Will is usually a quick, silent affair, with Will conditioned to eat quickly and efficiently rather than savoring the meal (though he clearly enjoys each hurried, partially chewed bite). Hannibal is working to train him out of the habit. It helps that Will is growing used to three regular meals a day, each one handcrafted by Hannibal to suit the boy’s needs.

“I am taking off until the end of October. I have quite a few weeks of vacation time saved up, and I think it best I stay with you for now.” For forever. Hannibal wishes to pursue psychiatry, yes, but not at the expense of healing and training his boy. “I hope to begin some lessons today, if you feel up to it after our outing.”

Will scrunches his nose “What kind of lessons? More empathy?”

“I was thinking of something more traditional. I would like to gather a baseline of your knowledge in math, science, and literature before I begin tutoring you.”

“You’re going to teach me?” That delectable red flush begins spreading over Will’s face. “I… You…Aren’t you too busy for that?”

“I am not. Your education is of high importance to me. With a mind like yours, you could pursue any career that you wanted, or none at all if that is your desire. You are officially a member of the Lecter household, and with that title comes a sizable fortune.”

Will’s flush disappears, replaced with white, pale skin. “Uh, what? What do you mean officially?”

“I received confirmation this morning that your birth certificate was received. Congratulations, you are now Will Lecter.” Hannibal doesn’t hide the pride in his voice as he caresses the name.

Will shudders, and the scent of honeyed pleasure mingles with fevered sweetness, filling the room. Will asks no further questions, remaining quiet as they wash their dishes and drive to the harbor. Their walk is long but set at a calm, steady pace. Even still, Will is breathing heavily by the end and his legs tremble with exhaustion, still too weak to carry him for more than an hour at a time.

Hannibal wonders, as they drive back home and Will slumps with a tired sigh into the passenger seat, just how much longer Will would have survived on his own if Hannibal hadn’t shown up. The boy’s father seemed to be in no rush to take the boy back into his home, and while Will had done remarkably well on his own for the past two years, it’s clear he could not have continued down that path for much more time. Weeks, perhaps. The thought of Will—slumped underneath some poorly constructed shelter out in the woods, starving and dying and *alone*—causes Hannibal such anguish that he hears a loud *creak* from where he’s gripped the steering wheel tight enough to rip leather.

For lunch, Hannibal serves the leftover lung stew, promising Will a more thorough dinner.

“You don’t have to worry,” Will says, slurping the last of the meat off his spoon with appalling manners. Hannibal sighs with adoration. “I love everything you feed me. I know you like to cook and present and whatever, but this,” Will gestures to his empty bowl and half-drunk protein shake, “is more than enough for me.”

“You’re too kind, Mylimasis.”

Will puts down his spoon and stares at Hannibal’s pochette, today a blue-striped fabric that matches Will’s flannel shirt. “You said that earlier this morning. What does it mean?”

Hannibal tilts his head. “What do you think it means?”

Will frowns, unsurprised at the lack of a clear answer, and thinks for a moment. “I…I’m not sure. It means something…good. Like a nickname.”

“My clever boy,” Hannibal murmurs, delighting in the pink tinge of Will’s ears. “If you are finished eating, I suggest you take some time to rest while I gather materials for your tutoring.”

“I always get so tired after I eat,” Will says, yawning. His arms stretch over his head, thin and waif-like. “Thanks.”

“Of course.”

Hannibal grabs the tests he printed out the night before and brings them to his office, arranging them on the wooden desk along with a pencil, eraser, and vitamin water.

When he opens his desk drawer to find a paperclip, he spots Bedelia’s business card lying on top of a stack of empty sketchbooks. Hannibal lifts it up, memorizes the number, and then tosses the card into the fireplace, watching as the paper curls in at the edges before disintegrating into a pile of ash.

Hannibal takes his phone out of his back pocket, types in the number, and listens to it ring once, twice, before Bedelia answers.

“Hello?”

“Dr. Du Maurier. I hope you are not currently occupied.”

“Hello, Hannibal. I am just wrapping up my lunch break. To what do I owe the pleasure?”

“I would like to arrange a meeting with you if possible. I’ve realized that I wish to make the switch from surgery to psychiatry sooner rather than later.”

“Ah, yes. I heard about what happened yesterday.”

Hannibal frowns and sits down in his leather armchair, staring out the window at the rapidly-changing leaves, deep greens turning to oranges and reds. “It was an unpleasant occurrence, certainly, but it only brought to light how unhappy I am with my current career. Is there a time this week you are available? Perhaps next Friday?”

Bedelia pauses, perhaps looking at her calendar, before saying, “I’ll have my assistant work out the details, but I believe that is manageable. Would you prefer to come to my office?”

“If you would be so kind as to host me.”

“I would be honored. Friday, then.”

“Goodbye, Bedelia.”

Bedelia hangs up, and Hannibal’s nose twitches with a familiar scent. He glances over and notices Will’s sock-covered feet sticking out from behind the doorway to his office, reminiscent of the first day Will woke up in Hannibal’s home.

“Will, it is not polite to eavesdrop.”

Will comes into the room, face burning with embarrassment, fear, and also some other emotion that Hannibal has never seen (or smelled) before. “Sorry,” he mutters, sounding anything but.

Hannibal sighs and turns in his chair so that his body is facing Will. “Now that you are part of my family and certain to stay, I believe it is best we set some ground rules for going forward.”

Will’s eyes widen and his lips tremble. He bites on his bottom lip, opening up the ever-present scabs. Hannibal’s nose twitches with the smell of sweet, coppery blood. “Other rules? You already gave me a few.”

“And what are they?”

Will raises a shaking hand and ticks off the rules one by one, lifting a finger for each. “Don’t try and leave the house. Ask if I want to go into the garage. Always finish my food. Don’t go into your bedroom uninvited.” He’s silent for a moment before adding, “Always be polite.”

Hannibal smirks. “I do believe that last one is more implicit than a stated rule, but I agree with your list so far. However, I think that eavesdropping would be considered the opposite of always being polite.”

Will pales and stares down at his feet. His toes scrunch up and down, pushing against the plush rug. “I’m sorry.”

“I appreciate the apology, Will, but penances must be paid. What do you think your punishment should be?”

Will face blanks and he sways on his feet. Hannibal reaches out and grabs Will before the boy collapses to the floor. Will’s entire body shakes, teeth clenching and rattling inside his skull so loud that Hannibal fears they might crack apart and turn to dust inside the boy’s mouth. Hannibal makes a soothing, nonsensical sound, pulling the boy into his lap. He runs a hand over Will’s back, moving it slowly over the boy’s spine, allowing his fingers to dip into each divot before caressing the next vertebrae poking out from underneath the flannel. It takes a moment, but eventually Will is able to calm down from his panic attack. His heart rate

slows to a manageable 120 beats per minute, and his body stops moving save for the occasional light tremor, like a delicate leaf that's being tugged by the wind, clinging to a branch for support.

"Will, are you feeling alright?"

Will lays his head on Hannibal's shoulder, and Hannibal feels like trembling himself when Will sucks in his scent like a man starved, nuzzling into the skin on Hannibal's neck.

"I'm fine," Will whispers, voice hoarse.

"I think lying is also not a polite behavior," Hannibal whispers back. "I am sorry the thought of punishment has upset you so much. Is this because of a negative experience you've had in the past? Perhaps something to do with your father?"

Will trembles again, hands coming up, vicelike, to grip Hannibal's arms. Hannibal enjoys the feeling immensely. "*A* negative experience makes it sound like it was only a one-time thing." Will shudders once more before pulling back from Hannibal's embrace, standing so that he's no longer tucked into Hannibal's lap.

Hannibal immediately wishes Will was back. He considers, for a moment, saying something else upsetting simply so that Will would come crawling back to him for comfort and protection, but the instant gratification of the action would be undone by the future negative consequences of Will expecting Hannibal to say upsetting things. Hannibal must not try and purposely upset the boy, at least not at this stage in their relationship.

Another time, once Will was more comfortable with using Hannibal for comfort.

"It was an ongoing problem, then," Hannibal says.

Will shoves his hands into his jean pockets and looks out the window. "I guess. I don't…I'm not sure what's normal and what's not. Maybe he was like every other father out there." Will shrugs, trying to look careless, but the sour tinge of his fear still lingers in the air. "He was just very physical. He liked for me to know when I did something wrong." Will drops his eyes to the floor and whispers, "And I was always doing something wrong."

Hannibal rolls his shoulders and swallows the anger burning in his throat. It is neither the time nor place for such a thing. This conversation is about Will, and Hannibal's emotions will be tempered to only revolve around Will as well, lest the boy see something not meant for him and be further hurt by it. "I see. In order to soothe your fears, allow me to explain what I meant by punishment. Your actions, while impolite, were minor in their slight. I was thinking a dinner without dessert would be a proper payment for your behavior."

Will smiles, tiny and disbelieving. "No…dessert? That's it?" When Hannibal raises an eyebrow, Will begins to laugh, though it sounds more pained than pleased. "Sorry, that… sounds fine to me. It's just," and here he wipes the back of his eyes with his hand before shoving it back into his pocket, "I never had dessert before you. Ever. If you took it away from me for the rest of my life, I wouldn't think I deserved any different."

“You deserve everything good thing in this world and more, Will.”

Will gives him a gift, then, and looks straight into his eyes. Will’s eyes are such a magnificent blend of blues, greens, and yellows, shining and surrounded by thick lashes. Hannibal wants to gaze into them forever, drown in the boy’s pupils and go swimming through his irises, plunging into the deep blues and floating on the burning yellows. He wants—

“Yeah,” Will breathes. “I’m starting to believe you really mean that.”

The rest of the day goes quickly. Will takes three different tests, automatically assumes he fails each one, and then listens with immense pleasure as Hannibal reads to him in Russian until he leaves to start preparing dinner.

It doesn’t feel real, this life that Will has stumbled into, but no amount of pinching along his thighs wakes Will from this dream, so he supposes his new reality is simply that: reality. And what a wonderful reality it’s turning out to be.

It’s not until Will is lying in bed that he thinks back to the conversation he overheard Hannibal having in his office, the one that led to Will’s embarrassing panic attack and subsequent calming—in Hannibal’s lap. Will tries to ignore the heat that builds inside of him as he remembers Hannibal’s thick, solid thighs underneath his own legs and the smell of Hannibal’s cologne as he nuzzled into the older man’s neck.

No. Will was going to ignore all that. Instead, he focuses on the fruits of his eavesdropping, which were worth even the almond cookie he was denied after a delectably filling dinner.

The conversation he’d overheard Hannibal have was…upsetting to Will, and he can’t figure out why. (He can. He was jealous of who Hannibal was speaking to in such pleasant, calm tones. *Bedelia*. Such a hideous name. Probably belonged to a smooth, polished woman with beautifully manicured hands and a long, delicate neck that would be so *easy* to snap between his outstretched hands. Just one hard twist…).

Will groans and shoves his face into the pillow, disturbed. Not by the jealousy, or the dark turn of his thoughts, but the lack of *care* he has about either one. Hannibal is the first person to show Will any sort of affection, so it was natural that Will is bonding with him. Caring for him. It made sense he was jealous. But for a single moment of jealousy to turn into violence after only a moment inside his mind?

Will must truly be a special kind of monster.

The next day, Will and Hannibal follow a similar routine as the day before. After breakfast Hannibal takes him outside—this time to a park that houses a large, stunning conservatory where Hannibal knows the names of almost every plant and Will feels he could happily spend the rest of his life in the warm, muggy air surrounded by Hannibal and nature—before eating lunch and spending the remainder of the day on lessons.

When the next day passes in the same manner, Will feels himself begin to relax, easily accepting this new routine like putting on his new boots or freshly tailored shirts. It feels

uncomfortable only because of how *not* uncomfortable it is. Will isn't used to comfort, but he is beginning to crave it in a dangerous way. If Hannibal were to throw him out now, Will doesn't know if he would make it a day on his own.

But Hannibal wouldn't do that. Will is a Lecter now (and what that entails, he still has no idea) which means Hannibal will take care of him. Forever.

Will likes the sound of that.

On Friday, two weeks since Hannibal first brought him to Baltimore (two weeks since his birthday), Hannibal makes an extravagant lunch and then tells Will that he has an errand to run, and he won't be back until late that night.

"Okay. Uh, what should I do while you're gone?" Will finishes washing his plate in the sink and hands it to Hannibal to dry, entranced by the sight of Hannibal's button-down shirt rolled up so that his forearms are exposed, veins bulging with each swipe of the towel until the plate is dried and put away.

"I have left you a few books to read, if you wish. I also purchased some piano music for beginners. It is sitting on the piano right now. And you are always welcome to nap, of course." Hannibal gives him a wry look, and Will blushes.

"Sure. I probably will." Will lets out a yawn, neither of them surprised. While it has gotten better the past two weeks, Will still feels incredibly tired after each meal he eats. His body is changing, growing at a rapid rate, and that is surely where all his energy is going. Hannibal had weighed him again last night and both of them were surprised—Hannibal ecstatic—at the seven pounds he'd gained.

"Wonderful." Hannibal rolls down his sleeves and Will sighs at the loss. "Until tonight, then."

Hannibal gives him a sweet smile and Will tries not to melt against the sink, holding himself up through sheer force of will. When Hannibal leaves, garage door shutting quietly behind him, Will goes to his bedroom and takes a nap. When he wakes, though, it's only been an hour, and there are still several more before Hannibal will be back.

It's the first time Hannibal has been away for a long period of time since he took off work. Will finds himself sorely missing the man, and before he even realizes what he's doing, Will leaves his bedroom—and since when did he come to think of the room as *his*—and slips silently down the hallway to the one room he's never been in.

Hannibal's bedroom.

The door is shut, but there is no lock on the knob, no keypad preventing him from going inside. Will gnaws on his bottom lip. Hannibal had not punished him since the incident with the eavesdropping; Will had not done anything worth punishment since then. But going into Hannibal's bedroom uninvited? That is certainly a punishable offense. Much worse than simply standing outside Hannibal's office and listening to one side of a phone call. This would guarantee a punishment much more harsh than his previous one. Perhaps no dessert

for a month, or no more walks in the park, or Hannibal going back to work and leaving Will alone all day with no one but himself for company.

Will bites down on his lip harder, comforted by the taste of blood that floods onto his tongue. He stares at the knob, mind burning with imagination, wondering just what Hannibal's room looks like. What it feels like. What it *smells* like.

He turns the knob.

The door swings open without a sound, as all doors in Hannibal's house do. The man must have a secret crew of people that come by every week to oil each hinge and grease each drawer so that nothing in the house moves with unnecessary noise.

Will curses his burning imagination (his burning stupidity) and walks into Hannibal's room.

It's different from how he pictured it, though no less impressive. Two of the walls are painted a dark blue, the other two paneled with gray wood. There's a large bed in the center, covered in a matching blue comforter and fluffy white pillows. Across from the bed is a large, ornate mirror that Will instantly blushes upon seeing, though he is not sure why. A fireplace sits in one corner of the room, filled with half-burned logs and the faint smell of smoke. The rest of the room, however, smells of Hannibal's cologne and his unique musk, and Will breathes deeply through his nose, memorizing the scent for later. When Hannibal comes back home and punishes him—for there is no way the man won't know that Will's been in here snooping—Will can recall this scent and remind himself that his curiosity was worth it.

Will walks over to a gray door and opens it, peering in and finding Hannibal's closet. The room is huge, easily the size of the entire trailer Will's father owned, and filled from floor to ceiling with clothing. The smell of Hannibal is stronger here, more concentrated, and Will walks inside the closet nearly lightheaded.

There, tucked under a row of ironed suits, is a laundry hamper. It's tall and wicker and exactly as posh and pretentious as Will expected it to be. He opens the lid and nearly moans at the scent of Hannibal's used clothing that wafts up from the basket. Will reaches inside with a trembling hand, pulling out a white undershirt identical to the one he's wearing save for the size (and smell). Will presses it to his nose, drawing in Hannibal's scent like a drug, and feels his cock start to stir in his trousers.

Startled, Will drops the shirt on the floor and nearly dashes from the room.

But…no one is here. Hannibal won't be back for hours yet, and Will…has never touched himself before. In fact, he can count on one hand the number of erections he's had in his life (and three of those five have occurred since living with Hannibal, including the one he currently feels throbbing in his pants).

Will rubs a hand against his crotch, shuddering at the guilty pleasure that shoots through his body. He slowly, delicately picks the undershirt back up off the floor and again presses it to his nose. He holds it to his face with one hand, using the other hand to grind against his cock, whining at the delicious heat that builds and builds inside his groin, all of it too much and not

enough until he rubs himself one final time and comes with a shudder and a high-pitched moan.

Oh god.

What has he done.

Will shoves the dirty shirt back into the basket, slams the closet door closed, and dashes from Hannibal's bedroom, making sure the door latches behind him. He stumbles to his own bathroom and strips off his clothing, shaking with fear and adrenaline and aftershocks of pleasure as he climbs into the shower and turns it on to the highest heat setting, allowing the burning water to wash away his shame.

Will has never come before. He hardly even knows what just happened. His last year at school was in fifth grade. The other kids had only just begun whispering about sex and what happened behind closed doors, and Will, who was never invited to conversations of those kind—or any kind—still was not sure what their whispered words meant. After, when he was on his own in the swamp, things as trivial as sex or pleasure were never on his mind. Food, shelter, and surviving were all Will had room to focus on for two years.

But now…

Will finishes scrubbing himself, growing hard again at the thought of Hannibal joining him there in the shower. He still had no idea what happens between two people, what sex means, but as long as Hannibal were there, Will imagines he would enjoy whatever happened.

Would Hannibal caress his face as he's done in the past? Would he be hard, too, cock straining against Will's chest as they ground against each other before spilling, skin slick with water and come? Will's heart races, and he touches himself again, pulling his hand back and forth over his small cock and letting out a moan, embarrassed as it echoes loudly over the tile and reverberates back into his ears. It only takes a few strokes before he comes again—the second time in his life—and he watches with fascination as white, viscous liquid pours from the tip of his cock, dripping onto his feet before swirling down the drain.

Will is shaking as he dries himself off. He has no idea what to do about his come-stained pants; Hannibal has Will place his dirty laundry into a basket and then whisks the basket away every few days before returning the clothes, folded and clean, for Will to put back into his dresser.

He supposes he'll just have to put the pants into the bottom of the basket and hope Hannibal doesn't notice.

Of course he'll notice.

Will groans, this time from anxiety and not pleasure, and walks to his bedroom wearing only the towel wrapped around his waist. He changes into a pair of pajamas, suddenly glad Hannibal won't be back until late, and slips underneath the covers of his bed. He's too keyed up to go back to bed, but there's no way he can focus on a book right now.

As he lays there in bed, Will hears a faint scratching noise in the distance. Confused, Will sits up and tries not to make any noise.

There. The noise is coming from downstairs.

Will slips off the bed and makes his way downstairs, sure that it's still too early for Hannibal to be home from his *errand* with Bedelia. The noise grows louder as Will gets closer to Hannibal's office. He walks into the empty room and the noise stops as suddenly as it started.

Will frowns, walking around the room, fingertips tracing over the spines of dozens of books. He sits in the leather armchair next to the fireplace and scratches his head.

Maybe his brain was making it up?

Scratch. Scratch. Will jumps up from the chair and runs to the fireplace. There must be an animal trapped inside. A raccoon, perhaps? Will doesn't know what sorts of animals live in Baltimore save for the various species of birds he's observed on his outings with Hannibal. Maybe it was a bird, then.

Will sticks his head through the grate and tries to peer up into the chimney, but it's far too dark for him to see anything, and the noise stops again right when he gets close.

For the next hour, Will sits in front of the fireplace, shoving his head back into the opening each time the noise reappears. He never sees—or smells—any animal, but there must be *something* making the noise. He'll have to ask Hannibal once the man gets home. Maybe there's a tree outside that scratches the chimney and causes noise, though if that were the case, Will is sure Hannibal would have trimmed the tree back by now.

The man hates unnecessary noise.

By the time Hannibal returns home, Will has fallen asleep on the rug, using his hands as a makeshift pillow.

"Will," Hannibal whispers, voice caressing the outside of his ear and blowing onto his cheek.

Will shoots up from the floor and quickly becomes dizzy-headed from the sudden movement. Hannibal, calm and steady as ever, guides him over to the armchair. Will is disappointed that Hannibal makes him sit in it alone instead of pulling Will into his lap like he did the other week.

"Busy day?" Hannibal asks, taking Will's wrist between his long fingers and counting his pulse.

Will thinks back to his…escapade into Hannibal's bedroom and finds himself blushing. "It was fine," he whispers.

"Just fine?" Hannibal asks, voice amused.

Did he already know? But how? Had he gone upstairs already without Will noticing and smelled Will inside of his room? Did he know what Will had done with the clothes inside his

closet?

Will groans and tilts his head back into the chair, knowing he deserved to be punished but still scared to confess. “I…might have gone into your bedroom.” Will tugs on one of his ears and sucks his bottom lip into his mouth. “I know I shouldn’t have. I deserve to be punished.”

Hannibal stares at him, eyes unreadable, before getting up from where he’d been kneeling in front of Will. He looks so tall, so strong, standing in front of Will like some ancient god ready to accept whatever sacrifice was gifted to his altar. Will was a sacrifice that would go willingly to whatever altar Hannibal dictated, so enamored with the man he could hardly *breathe*.

“And what punishment do you think you deserve?” Hannibal asks, voice lower than Will’s ever heard, practically a growl.

Will shivers at the sound and feels his traitorous dick begin to fill out inside his pajama bottoms. Apparently, now that Will has touched himself once (twice), his cock has decided that *any* time is a good time to become aroused.

Hannibal’s nostrils flare and his eyes turn completely black, not even a sliver of red left to curb the darkness. “I asked you a question, Will.”

Will wants to moan, to touch himself, to cry, to come apart at the seams until only Hannibal can pick up the pieces and put him back together again. He…needs to calm down. “Sorry. I, uh, still don’t know any punishments besides missing dessert and being physically punished.”

At the word *physically*, the muscles in Hannibal’s forearms jump, and Will swears he can smell the blood racing underneath Hannibal’s skin as it flows through the bulging veins that wrap around Hannibal’s arms like rope.

“I see,” Hannibal says. “And is going into my bedroom the *only* thing you did today that was worthy of punishment?”

Will pauses, unsure. Was touching himself something that required punishment? It wasn’t one of the rules Hannibal had given him. It didn’t seem impolite. Well, going into Hannibal’s closet and smelling his dirty clothing without permission was impolite. But Will touching himself while doing it? He has no idea if that is impolite, if that is something normal people did—though Will doubts it. He is so far from normal that it seems laughable he ever interacted with other kids his age, with his own father, with anyone other than Hannibal.

“I…no. I don’t think so,” Will says, licking his lips.

Hannibal’s black eyes trace the movement, and Will remembers what he told Hannibal that first night weeks ago, about always feeling like a mouse about to be devoured by a snake. He feels that way now, but he is anything but afraid, his heart racing with desire and excitement rather than fear. He’s sure Hannibal can smell the arousal pouring off of him, and from Hannibal’s current reaction, it seems the arousal is not unwelcome.

“Very well. For going into my room uninvited, I will invite you to something I feel might be more of a punishment than a pleasure.”

Will shivers at the way Hannibal’s accent curls around the word *pleasure*. Will imagines Hannibal’s tongue curling around his own, filling his mouth so that Will can’t breathe, doesn’t need air or water or anything but Hannibal and his scent and his body on Will’s.

“What are you inviting me to?” Will asks, voice hoarse.

Hannibal stares into his eyes, into his soul, and gives Will his widest grin yet. “We are going to the opera.”

The Show

Chapter Summary

Hannibal takes Will to the opera.

Hannibal wants to laugh at the horrified expression that overtakes Will's face. His eyes darken with dread and his supple mouth drags down at each corner, gravity proving too strong a force under such strenuous circumstances.

"The opera?" Will asks. "But…why?"

Hannibal schools his own expression into one of disappointment, though he feels anything but disappointed in his boy at the moment. "This is your punishment, Will. You are not to question why. You know why."

Will blushes, clearly remembering the specific behavior that had brought them to this conversation. Hannibal wishes he had installed security cameras in his bedroom so that he could see Will take his pleasure from whatever it was in Hannibal's room that triggered such a reaction rather than seeing the evidence of it on the boy's pants. The cameras had barely been able to pick up the image of Will's pants stained at the crotch before Will had hurriedly thrown them off once in the bathroom. There, Hannibal had been able to watch—with greedy, delighted eyes—as Will had taken his pleasure a second time while in the shower.

Hannibal can still smell Will's arousal in the air, sharp and cutting like clean glacier air and filled with a spicy, musky undertone that is unique to Will. Hannibal wants to take Will's fingers into his mouth, one by one, and suck on the skin of his fingertips until no traces of his bitter spend remain, all of it swallowed into Hannibal's stomach–which is never sated and always hungry for more. Hannibal can hardly wait for the day he gets to taste Will's spend straight from the source instead of attempting to taste it through the lingering smell that rests on the boy's fingertips.

That will have to wait, though. Hannibal must wait for Will. And until then, he will spoil the boy so thoroughly that he will not be able to remember a time before Hannibal, a life before Hannibal, anything but *Hannibal*.

Hannibal says, "I have season tickets to the theater. I believe there is a showing of *Carmen* tomorrow night that will fit nicely into our schedule."

The opera is not a punishment, not really, but Hannibal made rules for Will to follow, and though he is pleased by what occurred, he mustn't seem as though he is encouraging Will to do whatever he pleases around the house.

Will's eyes narrow and his head tilts to the side, examining Hannibal. "You were already planning on going to the opera tomorrow night, weren't you."

His clever, brilliant boy. Hannibal sighs and decides that honesty will be best in this situation. "I was, yes."

Will frowns again, this time in distress. "Then were you already planning on punishing me?"

"I hope that the punishment is not in attending the opera, but rather the steps we must take to get there." Hannibal allows his gaze to slowly travel up and down over Will's body, every inch a caress. "I was planning on convincing you to allow me to get you ready, but now I will simply take rather than asking. A haircut would not be remiss. A pair of new cuff links to go with your suit. Perhaps a trip to the spa, even. I think your nails could use a trim."

Will blinks and swallows hard, Adam's apple bobbing up and down in his exposed throat. "Yeah, that definitely seems more like a punishment than going to the opera."

"I assumed you would feel that way." Hannibal glances over at the clock. "Have you eaten dinner?"

Will's face turns the color of crushed carnations. He scratches the back of his neck and says, "No. Not yet."

Hannibal walks out of the office and gestures for Will to follow. He is still not sure why he found Will sprawled in front of the fireplace when he got home, but he will have to save that particular line of questioning for another time. "Let me make you something before you go to bed."

Will, apparently feeling more confident after his foray into Hannibal's bedroom and their subsequent conversation, says, "But I still get dessert, right?"

"Yes, you incorrigible boy. You still get dessert."

Will's face turns to one of shameful pleasure, and Hannibal imagines angel's in heaven weeping from the sinful beauty, jealous that a mere mortal could contain such perfect features, all smooth, pale skin and parted pink lips and dark eyes that swim with mirth. He thinks of Baglione's *Sacred and Profane Love*, of a curly-haired devil so tempting and captivating that even virtue itself cannot help but succumb to its vices, completely fallen from grace.

After dinner—and dessert—Hannibal sends Will to bed with a knowing look, eager to see whether the boy will take his pleasure again one last time. Will ends up falling asleep quickly after laying down, and Hannibal sighs, only slightly dismayed, before exiting out of the security camera app on his phone and pulling off his trousers to touch his own hardening cock. He strokes himself with the scent of Will's arousal still lingering in his nose and sitting in his mouth. When Hannibal arrived home and finally made his way into his bedroom, he had been surprised to find Will's scent strongest inside of the closet. While Will's scent does enhance his pleasure, Hannibal refuses to touch himself next to his laundry hamper, no matter

how tempting the idea of making himself come next to where Will had orgasmed for the first time since arriving in Baltimore—perhaps the first time he has ever come in his life.

Hannibal strokes himself harder and imagines Will sprawled on top of his bed, sweating and writhing with pleasure so intense it causes his eyes to leak with tears. Hannibal is touching the boy's sweat-slicked body, running his hands over Will's ribs, his stomach, his tiny cock. The boy bites his lip until blood spurts from the teeth marks, and Hannibal is finally there to lick up the crimson liquid. It rolls around on his tongue and the taste is salty and sweet and *home*.

Hannibal moves his hand faster, running a thumb over his slit and gathering the precum that collects there, bringing it to his mouth to smear onto his tongue. In his fantasy, it is Will that runs a delicate hand along the head of Hannibal's cock. His fingers are no less clever than his mind, and they twist and tug with the sole purpose of bringing Hannibal to his peak.

Hannibal groans and spills into his palm, allowing himself a few more strokes until the aftershocks turn from pleasure to pain, skating along his spine like small sparks of electricity. He licks his palm clean, goes to the bathroom to wash his hands and abdomen, and then climbs underneath his comforter, feeling as though there is a pocket of cool air in the bed next to him where a body should be.

The next morning, Hannibal makes a large breakfast, anticipating that he and Will will not return home from their errands until late that afternoon when they get dressed for the opera.

When Will comes downstairs to eat, Hannibal again smells that fevered sweetness he noticed first a few weeks ago. Waking with fever once was no cause for concern, but for the scent to appear again? Will must be coming down with an illness. Hannibal makes a mental note to take Will's temperature when they return from the opera that evening.

Will is mostly silent throughout breakfast, though each time he glances at Hannibal, the smell of his arousal begins to perfume the air like thick incense, and Hannibal feels his own arousal beginning to grow in return.

Hannibal clears his throat and says, "Our first errand of the day will be to the barbershop. I took the liberty of scheduling us both an appointment for ten o'clock this morning."

Will finishes washing his plate and hands it to Hannibal to dry. Hannibal pretends not to notice the way Will stares at his forearms as he moves the towel back and forth over the glass. The attention is extremely gratifying, and Hannibal preens under the scrutiny, flexing perhaps more than is necessary as he reaches up to put the plate into the cupboard. When he looks back at Will, the boy's pupils are dilated, and his cheeks have flushed a sinful red.

"Have you ever been to a barbershop before, Will?" Hannibal asks.

Will's eyes jerk from Hannibal's forearms up to his chin. "Uh…no. I don't think so."

"Then I hope you enjoy the experience. If you are amenable to the idea, I think it would be interesting if we continued our game from the last time we ran errands together where we ask one another questions. I am always wishing to know more about you."

Will tugs on one of his curls—now long enough to gently brush against his shoulders with every movement—and shrugs. “Yeah, we can do that.” He gives Hannibal a mischievous look. “But no more cheating and asking two questions at once.”

Hannibal tilts his head and grins. “Of course.” Will smiles back, and Hannibal’s heart thuds heavy in his chest. “Go get your jacket and put on your shoes. I’ll meet you at the garage door.”

Will leaves, and Hannibal grabs his own suit jacket from where it is hanging near the kitchen. His suit today is a lovely mint green with a light yellow paisley tie and matching pochette. Will seems very appreciative of the way the suit has been tailored to fit snug along Hannibal's legs and arms. Hannibal suddenly plans to wear the suit more often in the future.

In the car, Hannibal allows Will to ask the first question of the day.

“How old are you?” Will asks. His hands are tapping along his seatbelt, playing it like strings strung to the neck of a guitar.

“I turn twenty-nine in January,” Hannibal replies, glancing out of the corner of his eye for Will’s reaction. The boy doesn’t look surprised or pleased, face carefully blank while digesting this new piece of information. “How old did you think I was?”

Will’s head jerks to face him, quickly becoming embarrassed when he realizes Hannibal is watching his reaction. “I…I’m not sure. You already know that I’m no good with dates or ages or anything. But twenty-nine seems young. You’re so…”

Hannibal turns back to face the windshield and waits for Will to finish his sentence. He rolls his shoulders, ashamed at how tense he is over what Will might say. What words he would use to describe Hannibal. This seems less like finishing a sentence and more like Will passing judgment on Hannibal, an almighty judge with the power to end his life with a single swing of his gavel.

“...put together,” Will finishes, squirming around in his seat. “Confident? Poised? I don’t know the right word. It makes you seem older.”

Hannibal wishes it were his turn again to ask a question, but he bites his tongue and waits for Will to ask the next question.

“What is your favorite opera?” Will asks.

Hannibal is pleased with the question. Always a surprise, his Will. It’s one of the many reasons Hannibal lo–likes the boy. “*Giulio Cesare*. It’s widely considered Handel’s best opera. One day, I will take you to see it.”

Will sighs and shifts so that his head is resting against the window. “Let’s just see if I make it through this one first before we start planning another.”

Hannibal smiles and shakes his head. “You doubt yourself Will, but I do not.” Hannibal pulls into the parking lot for the barbershop and waits for Will to exit the car so he can guide the

boy into the shop. He has no doubt that, if given the choice, Will would remain inside the car for another year or two before venturing into the salon of his own accord.

As expected, Will stands, hunched and tense, in front of the entrance until Hannibal opens the door for him and gestures for him to go inside. Immediately, the smell of wet hair, shaving cream, and aged leather floods Hannibal's nose. It's a comforting smell, one he associates with order and opulence. There were times in his life where he wandered around much like Will, hair wild and untrimmed, no thought except where his next meal would come from. When he was eventually adopted by his uncle and Lady Murasaki, the first thing they did after feeding him was take him to the barber's shop to shave off the pile of knots that adorned his scalp. That association—between cutting his hair and cutting off the old part of his life—has remained solidified ever since. Hannibal can only hope that Will will come to have a similar association in his own mind between the smell of getting his hair trimmed and control and Hannibal.

"Ah, Dr. Lecter!"

"Mr. Vilnos, it is good to see you."

Mr. Vilnos, a middle-aged gentleman from Italy who wears exclusively striped pants and has a mustache that stretches from one side of his face to the other, has been Hannibal's barber for nearly a decade now since Hannibal first came to Baltimore to study medicine.

"And you must be Mr. Will Lecter," Mr. Vilnos says, giving Will a friendly smile but not attempting to shake his hand or touch him in any way. When Hannibal had called to make the appointment, he told the barber that Will was newly adopted and didn't appreciate being touched. While that is true in some sense, the reality is much simpler: Will is Hannibal's, and Hannibal does not like other people touching his things.

Will shuffles his feet, no doubt scrunching up his toes inside his tailored loafers, and Hannibal guides him to one of the chairs.

"How long do you want your hair to be, Will?" Hannibal asks. Will is an enchanting creature no matter the length of his hair, but Hannibal wants the boy to feel confident in how he looks and hopes that allowing him this decision will help in that endeavor.

"Is that your question," Will mumbles, face tucked into the collar of his sweater, a pine green cashmere pullover that brings out the green in his eyes.

"It is, yes."

Will darts his eyes to the mirror in front of him before quickly looking away. "I don't care," he says. "Whatever you think is best."

Pride blooms in Hannibal's stomach. His boy is learning to rely on him in all things, and Hannibal could not be more pleased. "If that is what you wish, Mylimasis." Hannibal turns to Mr. Vilnos and says, "*Qualche centimetro, credo. In modo che i capelli si trovino vicino alle sue orecchie.*"

In the mirror, Will's pupils dilate, swallowing up the green-blue of his irises until only a small ring of color is left, the rest of his eye consumed by black.

Oh, his boy *likes* it when Hannibal speaks Italian. Hannibal wonders if it is just hearing Italian that sparks such arousal in Will or if other languages would as well. Hannibal hopes he has the opportunity to test out his French and Japanese tonight when they are at the opera and see if Will reacts to hearing those too. His Lithuanian hardly gets any use here in Baltimore, but when he brings Will to France to visit their family, Hannibal is eager to see if his native tongue garners such a lovely reaction in Will.

Will is silent throughout his haircut, and Hannibal does not prompt him to speak, content to simply watch as several inches of hair are snipped away, leaving Will's curls sitting tucked around the bottoms of his ears. Now, his hair frames his delicate face rather than overwhelming it. His boy is *stunning*.

"Wonderful, Will." Hannibal murmurs, slipping his hand down to rest against Will's back as they both look into the mirror. Will blushes and looks away. He leans further into Hannibal's touch, though, seeking comfort, and Hannibal wants to devour his boy, audience be damned.

"And for you, Dr. Lecter?"

Hannibal sighs and reluctantly sits down into the recently-vacated chair, unhappy to no longer be touching Will. "Just a trim. A shave as well, if you please."

"Of course."

It takes only a few minutes for Hannibal's trim and shave, and the entire time, Will's eyes never stray from Hannibal's reflection in the mirror. Hannibal pretends not to notice, speaking with Mr. Vilnos in Italian and pretending to care about what the man says of his family and business. Will's pupils remain dilated throughout their conversation, the pink flush spreading from his cheeks and migrating down the column of his throat.

After, when they are back in the Bentley and on the way to buy cuff links that are properly matched to Will's new suit, Will finally asks, "How many languages do you speak?"

"Fluently?" Hannibal replies. "Eight. I also can read Latin, but I never speak it except for the occasional medical term. Do you speak any languages other than English?"

Will shakes his head, and his freshly-washed curls bounce around his head, shimmering bronze and copper in the morning sun. "No, not really." Will taps his leg and adds, "I know a little French. But not real French. Creole French."

"Any language is a real language, Will. I would love to hear you speak it sometime."

Will scrunches up his nose. "You really wouldn't."

Hannibal hums, non-committal, and waits for Will's next question.

"Why did you move to America? I mean, your family is still in France, right? Isn't it lonely here without them?"

“I do not…feel emotions as most people do. So no, I do not feel lonely without my family. I moved to the United States because the opportunities to advance were much greater here than what was offered to me in France. And I am so incredibly grateful I came here.”

Will turns his head, a *why?* without voicing the question.

“Because it meant I was able to meet you,” Hannibal replies, voice soft.

Will burns, the scent of embarrassed pleasure filling the air, and Hannibal smiles.

Will tugs on the bottom of his dress shirt, uncomfortable and uncertain and above all *terrified*. “Are you sure we have to go tonight? I don’t think I’m really…opera material.”

Hannibal reaches over and smooths down the front of Will’s shirt, fingers lingering over his stomach, a slow caress that threatens to burn Will from the inside out. “Of course you are, Mylimasis. You are far more clever than even the smartest of my acquaintances, and your countenance is a hundred times more lovely than any of the statutes that surround the theater.”

Will tries not to roll his eyes at the flattery, secretly pleased and entirely unwilling to let it show; Hannibal’s ego does not need to be stroked any more than it already had been by each of the shop owners they visited throughout the day. It was strangely amusing to watch such polished, professional people throw themselves at Hannibal’s feet, begging for even a crumb of his attention. And through it all, Hannibal remained entirely focused on Will, as if he were the only thing on earth worthy of his gaze, his thoughts. His attraction.

It’s difficult though for Will to hide the reaction he has to Hannibal’s words. Each of Hannibal’s compliments are like a tiny pill that, when swallowed, turn to pure pleasure inside Will’s body, filling his veins with a simmering satisfaction that is becoming far too addicting.

Will looks at the cuff links that are now buttoned to each sleeve of his suit. They are made of large, oval pearls that sit surrounded by a ring of diamonds, each glittering gem the size of a grain of salt. Will can’t even imagine how much the pair of cuff links cost, though he has no doubt that if he were to ask Hannibal, the man would have no qualms about divulging the price. Will has come to realize that Hannibal enjoys how much money he spends on Will, how much he *owns* Will and everything he wears.

“I think I’m ready, then,” Will says.

He looks in the mirror one last time, not believing that the person he sees in the reflection is the same one he saw two weeks ago after Hannibal brought him to Baltimore. That person was scared, too, but dirty and underfed and covered with a mane of lank, matted hair. The person that gazes back at him now is clean, well-fed, even better dressed, and is surrounded by washed, fluffy curls that rest just above the collar of a freshly-tailored suit.

“Then let us go,” Hannibal murmurs, putting a hand on Will’s shoulder to guide him to the car.

Will pretends not to notice how much more Hannibal has been touching him of late. He is sure there is a reason for all of the contact, but he can't figure out what it may be. Is Hannibal trying to bond with Will even more so that Will is further under his control? If so, he is fighting a battle that is already won. Will has no intention of leaving Hannibal, now or ever, and each touch—each caress—is merely fuel stoking an already out-of-control blaze.

The car ride to the theater is blessedly silent, filled only by the sound of violin and piano playing softly from Hannibal's stereo. Will doesn't think he could manage a conversation right now. His stomach is tied into tight knots, and the most he could conjure right now is a grunt of displeasure at having to be here in the first place.

At the theater, Hannibal hands his car keys over to a woman dressed in a vest and black pants —a *valet*, Hannibal calls her—before they walk side by side up a set of marble steps. The theater is a long, white building, and the front doors are made of polished glass that reflects the headlights of the dozens of cars pulling up behind them.

Inside, Will is instantly overwhelmed by the number of people that mill about the lobby. He can count over fifty people just in the front entryway, and there is no telling how many more will be inside the actual theater. Will breathes deeply, trying to slow his racing heart, and considers—for only the briefest moment—grabbing Hannibal's hand as a proxy way of grabbing on to some semblance of calm. Hannibal seems nearly serene in the crowd, standing above every other patron like a god of opulence. Each of his movements is smooth, controlled, and the crowd of people part around him almost without conscious thought, a school of fish swerving as one to avoid a predator.

"What do you think?" Hannibal asks, and Will has to search for a second to find his voice buried underneath all of his anxiety.

"It's a lot of people," Will responds, certain that Hannibal is asking about the theater and not the crowd but unable to come up with any other response.

"It is. Would you like to go upstairs? There's a loft area that is only accessible to season members, and I promise the crowd will be much smaller."

Will nods, trembling, and follows Hannibal up one set of stairs, then another. People greet Hannibal with small waves and fake smiles, but none come to try and converse with them for which Will is infinitely grateful.

The loft turns out to be a large room with plush carpet, a bar stocked with more alcohol than Will ever knew existed, and a piano forte being played by a man with gelled hair and slim, fast-moving fingers.

"Dr. Lecter!" someone calls, voice harsh and grating against the soothing piano music.

Will turns to find a man and woman standing close together near the piano. The woman is dressed in an exquisite red gown, long and sultry and covered in diamonds. Her hair is pulled back into a severe bun, and her bright red lipstick merely emphasizes the downturned corners of her mouth.

The man…

Will thinks back to a book he read in second grade. The picture on the front cover depicted a mad scientist, the villain of the story. The man in front of him instantly reminds Will of the scientist, and not for anything good. The man's blond hair sticks up as if he just finished sticking a fork in an electrical socket. He wears rectangular wire-rimmed glasses that sit precariously on the end of his nose. But it's his eyes—his wild, crazed eyes—that mark him as truly *mad*.

"Mr. Verger," Hannibal replies, voice the picture of courtesy. Will knows Hannibal better, knows that he is feeling anything but courteous at the moment. How can no one else see the tension in Hannibal's arms, the way his shoulders roll back as the man and woman walk over? Are they really so blind? Or, as Hannibal had said a few weeks ago, do people truly just choose not to look? "I see you brought your sister with you tonight."

Mason laughs—no, cackles—and wraps a possessive arm around the woman's waist. She looks indifferent to the rough handling, mouth no more downturned than it was before. Mason's eyes glide from Hannibal down, down, until they eventually land on Will.

Will has never felt more unsettled in his entire life.

Mason is positively *feral*. He looks at Will as if every dream in his life has suddenly come true, and each one of those dreams revolve around fucking and killing Will in the most brutal, horrifying manner possible. If Hannibal's eyes drip blood, Mason's eyes are *made* of blood, no distinction from where the pupils end and the violence and gore begin. Will imagines the rivers of blood that would flow if the man's eyes were plucked out and his deranged mind were exposed to the outside world.

"And who is *this*?" Mason asks, lips stretching into a grin. "I didn't know you had a kid, Dr. Lecter."

Hannibal, face as passive as ever, rests his hand at the base of Will's spine. Will allows the touch, the scent of Hannibal bringing him out of the fear that had clogged his throat and frozen his muscles. "This is Will Lecter. I recently adopted him from Louisiana. His father passed away, and Will is an extremely bright child. I suppose I see some of myself in him."

Mason throws his head back and laughs, entirely too loud for the current setting. Even Will, with his limited knowledge of social cues, knows that Mason is not acting as he should. Several other people in the room throw dirty looks at their group of four, and whispers spread from one side of the room to the other, their voices muffled behind glasses of expensive champagne and gloved hands.

"I'm sure you see lots of yourself *in* him Dr. Lecter. I didn't realize you liked 'em so young." When Hannibal opens his mouth, Mason lifts a hand to silence him. "No, no, I get it. You and I have that in common."

Mason looks back down at Will, and Will forces himself not to shrink under the ferocity of the gaze. Will reminds himself that he is standing next to the most powerful man he's ever

met, the most violent and deadly man—perhaps even more deadly than Mason—and the thought brings Will comfort rather than fear. Hannibal is here. Hannibal will protect him.

“Mason,” the woman murmurs.

“Ah, my Margot is upset with me.” Mason turns to face Margot and leers, spending too long gazing at her cleavage. Hadn’t Hannibal just said that Margot was this man’s sister? Again, Will curses his lack of knowledge for what is and isn’t acceptable in public. Is this normal? Somehow, Will believes that nothing Mason Verger does is normal.

Mason tightens his grip on Margot’s waist, and her mouth tightens along with it. Mason leans in and whispers into her ear, loud enough for both Will and Hannibal to hear, “Your mouth gets rough when you’re scared, Margot.”

Margot’s face pales, and Will looks away, unable to stomach anymore. He presses back against Hannibal’s hand, begging him to end this conversation or, better yet, end their trip to the opera and simply head home.

“I’m afraid I must continue making introductions with the rest of the patrons. Mason, Margot,” Hannibal tilts his head at the siblings. “Until next time.”

Mason stares at them as they walk away, and Will nearly stumbles under the pressure from Mason’s gaze, a heavy, chilling weight on his back not unlike a fur coat that’s been soaked in icy mud and then thrown onto his body.

Hannibal guides him closer to the bar, hand remaining firm and warm on his back. A group of older women widen their circle once Hannibal approaches, each eyeing Hannibal with various degrees of lust. Will wrinkles his nose. God, this day really has been a punishment. Hannibal is certifiably insane if he thinks Will will ever agree to come to another opera of his own volition. Not after this.

One of the women, older with a severe bob and sagging boobs, looks right at Hannibal and says, “We were just discussing your last dinner party.” She sees Will standing next to Hannibal and does a double-take. “Oh? And who is this handsome young gentleman?”

Will squirms as every one of the women immediately turn to look at him. He feels like a bleeding fish that’s just been tossed into a tank of sharks.

“This,” Hannibal says with no small amount of pride in his voice, “is Will Lecter. I finalized his adoption only a few weeks ago.”

The whole group squeals, apparently titillated at such news.

Another woman, this one younger and dripping in pearls, says, “Why, Dr. Lecter, I didn’t take you for the fatherly type.”

“Neither did I, till I met Will.” Hannibal looks down at him, and Will meets the man’s eyes, desperate to see something comforting in this strange world he’s been thrust into. The emotions he finds there are powerful, yes, but comforting in the same way a fire is both

familiar and deadly. Will has to warn himself not to get too close, lest he burn his fingertips on the desire blazing from Hannibal's face. "He is truly special."

"This is too much," the older woman says. She cocks her hip and says, "It's been too long since you properly cooked for us, Hannibal."

Will is shocked by the use of Hannibal's first name. He didn't think any of these… acquaintances of Hannibal would be close enough to him to feel comfortable using it.

Hannibal smiles, something perfectly tailored for the occasion like the blue suit he is wearing. "Come over and I will cook for you."

The woman crosses her arms, not swayed in the least. "I said properly. Means dinner and the show." She turns to Will and asks, "Have you seen him cook? It's an entire performance. He used to throw such exquisite dinner parties. You heard me. *Used* to."

Hannibal laughs, polite and nearly tinkling, and replies, "And I will again, once inspiration strikes. I cannot force a feast. A feast must present itself."

The woman pouts. "It's a dinner party, not a unicorn."

Hannibal, ever ready with a clever reply, says, "Oh, but the feast is life. You put the life in your belly and you live."

The entire group chitters as if Hannibal has just said the most profound thing, and Will is only partially sure he manages to stop his eyes from rolling. As if sensing his amusement—and perhaps he does sense it, since Hannibal seems to know what Will is feeling before even Will knows himself—Hannibal grabs Will's arm and squeezes it gently.

On the other side of the room, the doors are suddenly thrown open, and a man in a ridiculous velvet outfit announces that everyone should make their way to their seats as the show is about to begin.

Hannibal guides Will out of the open doors and through the magnificent theater with its vaulted ceiling, plush red chairs, and golden trim. They end up sitting in a box to the left side of the stage, just the two of them in the small space, only separated from the outside world by a velvet curtain. Will relaxes at Hannibal's side, finally (somewhat) at ease for the first time since they have stepped into the building.

"I…apologize if my acquaintances have caused you any distress. Mrs. Komeda means well. And Mason Verger…"

"Is a sociopath? Yeah, I picked up on that pretty quickly. His eyes are…" Will doesn't finish his sentence, merely slumps into his seat and shudders. "I thought rich people were supposed to be stuck-up, not insane."

"I'm afraid mental illness does not pick and choose between the wealthy and poor." Hannibal looks down at Will with barely-concealed amusement. "Though the wealthy tend to have

better access to treatment. Unfortunately for us, some choose not to seek that treatment regardless."

The lights go down in the theater, and below the stage, an orchestra starts to play, a cacophony of notes and sounds that eventually blends into a single, even tone. Will sits forward in his seat, suddenly eager to watch the opera. He's never been in a theater before, never heard live music, never seen a stage or heard an orchestra. Will finds himself actually excited for the show.

Hannibal leans down into his ear and whispers, "All of the lyrics are in French. If you would like, I can provide a summary of sorts every so often. I always find that music is more enjoyable when you know the story behind the sentiment."

Will shivers at Hannibal's breath on his ear, and he nods his head, looking forward to each moment Hannibal will lean down and whisper to him, voice soft yet passionate.

The opera begins, and Will is instantly taken with the music, the costumes, the *emotion*. Will's empathy is alight with feeling, swept away by the tears in the actor's eyes and the trembling in their hands as their voices soared into the atmosphere. Will feels tears spring up in his own eyes, and when he turns to face Hannibal to see if he is similarly affected, he finds Hannibal already looking down at him, twin tears flowing softly over his sharp cheekbones.

"It's beautiful," Will whispers, unsure whether he should be speaking at all, caught up in the spell that the music has cast over the audience.

"Beautiful indeed," Hannibal whispers back.

Will feels his cheek heat under Hannibal's gaze, suddenly sure that Hannibal is not just referring to the show. Will looks back to the stage and tries to control the fluttering that blossoms inside of his abdomen.

True to his word, Hannibal leans down at regular intervals to summarize what is happening on stage. He translates some of the French in real time, and Will is certain that he will never be able to hear opera again without thinking of Hannibal's voice whispering in seductive tones while sopranos belt out arias in unimaginable ranges.

At the end of the show, Will has cried during no less than four separate songs, and normally he would be embarrassed but such a show of emotion, but Hannibal is simply *beaming,* delighted that Will takes such pleasure in one of the few things that brings the man joy. Hannibal is the first in the audience to rise for the final ovation, clapping with fervor. Will stands and joins him, watching Hannibal the entire time rather than the stage, unable to tear his eyes away from the tears that glisten on Hannibal's face. They look like dripping jewels, tiny diamonds that glimmer under the gold trim and brilliant stage lights.

He is beautiful.

Will sighs, unsure how to feel about his continued attraction to Hannibal, and allows the man to guide them both out of the theater and outside to wait for the Bentley. The air is cool, crisp. It's clearly fall now, no longer summer, and Will shivers in the light breeze. Hannibal notices

his slight trembling and, without hesitation, takes off his suit jacket and wraps it around Will's shoulders.

"Hannibal," Will says, shrugging one shoulder to remove the jacket. "You'll get cold."

Hannibal stares at him, eyes black under a starless sky, and shakes his head. "I won't, Mylimasis. Let me take care of you."

Will pauses his movements, hands gripping the collar of Hannibal's jacket, no doubt wrinkling the extraordinarily expensive fabric. Hannibal doesn't even blink, simply takes his hand and smooths the jacket back over Will's shoulders so Will is practically drowning in the silky fabric. Will breathes in the scent of Hannibal's cologne, eyes rolling back at the delicious, smoky smell.

"Better?" Hannibal asks. His voice is low, accent thick on his tongue.

Will nods his head and grips the jacket tighter. Now that he has it, he never wants to let it go. "Yeah, better."

The Feathered Stag

Chapter Summary

Bedelia begins to mentor Hannibal. Will begins seeing a feathered stag.

Sunday is spent in lazy companionship, with Hannibal waking late (compared to his usual standards) and making a light breakfast of fruit parfait and sausage made from John Graham's intestines. Will does not wake until nearly noon, and Hannibal imagines a future in which Will wakes in Hannibal's bed, sleepy and bleary-eyed and luxuriating in the pleasant soreness from a night well-spent while Hannibal feeds him sweet things by hand.

Will eventually comes downstairs when the sun is directly overhead and streaming through the windows of Hannibal's office, analogous in strength to the spotlights used on stage last night. Hannibal soaks in the warmth as he sits at the piano composing a new melody. He is still uncertain of the right key to place it in that will accurately convey the passion he feels when pressing each key.

Hannibal turns from the piano bench to greet Will. "Good morning, Mylimasis. I trust you slept well?"

Will shuffles into the room, rubs his eyes with both hands, and merely grunts in response.

Hannibal points in the direction of the kitchen. "Allow me to reheat your breakfast. I apologize, but I have already eaten." Hannibal allows amusement to color his voice as he says, "I feared you would never wake, and my stomach was upset at the thought."

Will grins, a small, sleepy movement, and Hannibal grins back. He saves this scene inside his mind, placing it within a golden frame in his Mind Palace to match the golden hues of Will's hair as it glistens in the sunlight. He sprays the framed image with the scent of Will's fevered sweetness, allowing the cloying scent to settle over the frame in glistening dewdrops. The painting hangs along a narrow corridor of the Norman Chapel, an angel brought home.

In the kitchen, Hannibal brings Will's parfait out from the fridge and places a long, thin spoon into the cup. He reheats the sausage, frowning when he realizes how little meat he has left in stock. With so much of his time now occupied with Will, Hannibal has not gone hunting since bringing John Graham back from Louisiana. He will have to slip Will a sleeping pill sometime this week after dinner and go hunting before the boy wakes.

Hannibal walks into the dining room, pleased to find Will already sitting in his seat to the right of Hannibal's. It is Will's seat now; no one is ever allowed to sit there save for his boy.

"Here you are, Mylimasis. Try to eat slowly this time. We are in no rush."

Will blushes and squirms in his seat, picking up the spoon with exaggerated carefulness and slowly bringing it to his lips. He looks Hannibal straight in the eye before reaching out with his tongue and giving the parfait scooped onto the spoon a tiny kitten lick. His bright pink tongue swirls into the white yogurt and pulls it back into his waiting mouth with a satisfied hum. Will smiles, the picture of innocence, and proceeds to eat the entire parfait with similar small licks, each delicate and slow.

Hannibal has never been so entranced in his life.

When the last serving of parfait has been licked from the spoon, Will smacks his spit-slick lips and sighs. “You’re right,” he murmurs, eyes darkening as they roam over Hannibal’s face. “It is better when you savor each bite.”

Hannibal clears his throat. “I’m glad to hear it.”

Will grins and picks up his fork, spearing the nearest piece of sausage—his *father*—and taking a little nibble of the meat before chewing it with slow, controlled movements, his defined jaw working hard with each up-and-down motion. The sausage smears grease onto Will’s already wet lips, and Hannibal wants to lick it off, to taste the meat he provided mixed with the intoxicating taste of Will.

Patience. He must be patient.

After Will’s…show at breakfast, the two of them wash and dry Will’s plate in the kitchen before heading to Hannibal’s office. It has become a sanctuary of sorts, a bubble that exists only for them, as if whatever occurs in that room is disconnected from the outside world, and the bubble is only broken when one of them leaves the room.

“What would you like to do today?” Hannibal asks, sitting in the leather armchair in front of the fireplace.

Will scratches his head, either unaware or uncaring of the way his curls have become tangled together, flattened on one side from where he had lain against his pillow. Hannibal thinks it unfair how adorable Will looks in such a state.

“Uh, I’m not sure.” Will peeks up at Hannibal from beneath his lashes. “When do you have to go back to work?”

Hannibal leans back into the chair and places his hands, clasped, over his knee. “I have decided to quit my job at the hospital. My psychiatry training will take a great deal of time, and I also wish to be here for you. There is simply not enough time to continue all three.”

Will’s eyes widen, shocked but pleased. “Oh. And when does your psychiatry training start?”

“On Wednesday. Dr. Du Maurier has graciously offered me a temporary position working with her at her private practice.”

Will’s nose scrunches up, and he goes to sit on the piano bench, idly tapping out a few notes. “Okay. Well, we have a few more days just us, then. I kind of want to stay inside today.” His

fingers pluck out a few more notes before he turns to face Hannibal, sitting backwards on the bench. “I think yesterday was a lot more…yeah, just more.”

“I agree. I would apologize again for Mason’s behavior, but—”

“But we don’t apologize for things that are out of our control,” Will finishes.

Hannibal nods, allowing Will the interruption. His boy is right after all, and quoting Hannibal’s own words back to him is an easy way to forgiveness, especially when the words are delivered with such solemn reverence. “Indeed. How quickly you learn.”

Will tucks his head into his collar and bites at his bottom lip. “I want to work on language today. Do you think…I mean…could I learn some Italian? If we *are* going to another opera—and that’s not a suggestion by the way, I would be happy to never set foot in a room with another person besides you for the rest of my life—but if we did, I want to know at least some of what they are singing.”

“An excellent idea. Let me fetch a book I think will help. It is a children’s story, and the pictures will help you solidify the connection between the words and their meaning.”

Will nods, and Hannibal wants to praise him again, happy that Will is becoming more comfortable with asking for his desires rather than assuming that they will never come to fruition.

Hannibal walks over to the bookshelf, skimming his eyes over a dozen or so different books before finding the one he is searching for.

“Would you like to sit closer? It will be easier if you can see the words at the same time I speak them,” Hannibal says, keeping his voice light.

Will looks at the leather armchair, then at the ground. “Do you want me to sit on the floor?”

Hannibal smiles and says, “I was hoping you would sit on my lap. It is merely a suggestion, of course. But it would make it easier for me to point out the words. Languages are a tricky thing to learn.”

Will’s face turns an interesting shade of purple, and Hannibal breathes in the embarrassment and arousal that wafts from the boy and curls around the room like a thick layer of smoke. “Uh, I don’t…I’m not…” Will huffs and tugs on one of his ears. “Isn’t that only for little kids?”

“It is for whoever desires such a thing. There is no age limit on proper learning, Will,” Hannibal says, purposely obtuse about what, exactly, is making Will so uncomfortable.

Will sighs and gets up from the piano bench, a strange mixture of resignation and excitement crossing his face. “Alright, I guess.” He gives Hannibal an unimpressed look. “But only so I can see the words better.”

“Of course, Mylimasis.”

Hannibal sits in the chair and spreads his thighs wider, amused as Will's eyes dart down to his crotch and stare for longer than is polite before bouncing back up to his chin. Will hovers in front of Hannibal, wringing his hands and shuffling from one foot to the other.

"Are you sure?" he asks, voice nearly a whine. "I…I'm too heavy."

Now it's Hannibal's turn to look unimpressed. "Will, my sweet boy, you weigh less than the groceries I bring into the house. Please, sit."

At the command, Will's knees immediately buckle, and he crawls onto Hannibal's lap, trembling legs swinging so they face the fireplace. Will places his hands into his lap and wiggles, trying to get comfortable. Hannibal huffs out a breath and ignores the growing heat in his groin, reminding himself that this was *his* idea, and now that Will is cradled so nicely against his body, he must do everything in his power to keep the boy there, not scare him away.

"Perfect," Hannibal murmurs, wrapping his free arm around Will's waist and dragging him closer so that the entire right side of Will's body is pressed into his chest. Will squeaks and flushes at the touch, practically feverish where they are connected.

Hannibal allows himself a moment to soak in the sensation of Will so close, perched on his legs and leaning against his chest, before opening the book and beginning to read.

"*C'era una volta*," he murmurs, watching with fascination as his breath jostles Will's curls, so shiny and soft now that the boy is regularly washing them and using conditioner. "That means *once upon a time*."

Will trembles, and Hannibal uses his free hand to gently stroke the boy's back, a light touch that begins at the top of his exposed neck and continues down to where his spine meets his hips. Will arches beneath the touch, curving his back to press further into Hannibal's hand.

"*Viveva una giovane donna*."

And so it continues. Hannibal allows his tongue to savor each syllable, leisurely turning one page after another. Will's trembling subsides, and eventually he begins to ask questions about certain words or pronunciations, eyes taking in the picture book with wonder.

When the book finally ends, Hannibal sighs, displeased that his excuse to hold Will close is now finished. "Should we read it again?" Hannibal asks, determined for Will to stay on his lap for just a moment more.

"If you want." Will bites his lips and shifts on Hannibal's lap. "I, uh, can remember things I've seen, so it's really not necessary."

Hannibal sets the book down on the coffee table and moves Will in his lap so that the boy is facing him, legs straddling his waist, rather than turned toward the arm of the chair where Hannibal had held the book. Will stares at Hannibal's lips, eyes half-closed and slightly foggy.

“What do you mean?” Hannibal asks, brushing an errant curl away from Will’s face and tucking it behind his small ear. “Do you remember what you read for a short while? Or forever?”

Will squirms under the attention and brings his arms up so that they circle Hannibal’s neck. His breath fans over Hannibal’s lips, warm and smelling of strawberries and spiced meat. “Forever. Everything I read, everything I hear, everything I see…it all sits in my head. Forever.”

Hannibal shakes his head, once again amazed that he found this remarkable boy. That he *owns* him. That Will is his, irrevocably and completely until the end of time, and even when time has ended, Hannibal vows that he will still find a way to keep Will at his side. “Simply amazing,” he murmurs. “An eidetic memory. Do you know how rare a gift that is to have?”

Will sighs and drops his head so that it’s tucked into Hannibal’s throat. His lips lightly brush the skin on Hannibal’s neck as he says, “Another curse, you mean. There’s so much I want to forget. But I *can’t*.”

“Then perhaps a different solution is needed. Instead of trying to forget, you must simply make so many new, pleasant memories that you have no time to go back and relive the old.”

“I don’t know…”

“I do. We are more similar than you think, Will.”

Will breathes out, and Hannibal savors the sensation as the moist air fans out from Will’s lips and caresses his neck, causing his skin to prickle. “Okay. I believe you.”

Hannibal places his hand on the back of Will’s head, fingers digging into those soft, luscious curls. “That is all I am asking, Mylimasis.”

They sit like that for a long time, an eternity perhaps, until Will’s breathing finally evens out, and he falls asleep tucked against Hannibal. The feeling of holding something so precious in his arms is one Hannibal has not experienced for many, many years. There is only one other person who has ever evoked such strong emotion inside of him, and those emotions—while powerful—were so different from what Hannibal is feeling now. He wishes he could press Will even closer, until the line between their bodies blurred, until there was no distinguishing where one of them began and the other ended.

Hannibal delicately strokes his hand along Will’s back and sits, content, waiting for his boy to wake, perfectly happy if Will never did, and they remained in this position forever. He smells the sweetness that clings to Will’s skin and curls and allows his nose to brush against the soft hair on Will’s head. Hannibal continues stroking Will’s back for minutes, hours, each second a treasure he clings to with the intent of hoarding like a dragon hoards gold.

When Will does eventually wake up, it is with a cry and a sudden jerk, the boy’s nightmare tossing him from sleep; Will acts as though he were tossed from a moving train and hit the ground with a vicious *thud*.

Hannibal pulls Will away from his chest and looks down into the boy's wild eyes, still crazed with fear from whatever he had seen in his dreams.

"Will," he says, keeping his voice soft, "Will, are you awake? Can you hear me?"

After a moment, Will's eyes eventually clear from their nightmare-induced fog, and his breathing begins to slow. He gets up from Hannibal's lap and walks over to the fireplace on unsteady feet, leaning against the mantle as if it is the only thing keeping him from collapsing. Perhaps it is.

"Would you like to share what you dreamed?" Hannibal asks. "It might help."

"It might not," Will answers, voice thick and gravely. "I don't really feel like talking about it."

"As you wish." Hannibal glances toward the window, surprised to find it is nearly dark outside. "I am going to prepare dinner. Would you like to help?"

Will waits a moment before nodding. "Yeah, sure. Just give me a second."

"Of course. Whenever you feel ready."

Hannibal walks to the kitchen and begins gathering all the ingredients for their meal, *tteokbokki*, substituting the traditional fish for thin slices of human thigh. Hannibal plays the album for *Carmen* on the kitchen's stereo, hoping Will finds the music as touching today as he did last night.

Will comes into the kitchen and smiles when he hears the opera's most famous aria playing over the speakers. He goes to the sink and washes his hands before coming to stand by Hannibal's side. "It's beautiful. But the live music is just…"

"Unparalleled."

"Exactly. It's like some emotion is just too large to be recorded and has to be strained out before the music can fit onto a disc. The music is pretty, but the passion is…flat. Missing."

Hannibal smiles and shakes his head. "It's astonishing how you are able to take such nebulous concepts and fit them so neatly into a sentence or two. I must admit, I'm slightly jealous."

Will knocks his hip against Hannibal's, and Hannibal shivers, delighted that Will has initiated the contact between them. "Only slightly? Careful Hannibal, all those compliments are going to give me a big head."

They grin at each other, two fools in lo–like, before Will's head suddenly snaps up to stare out of the glass doors behind Hannibal, the ones that lead into the small yard out back. Will's eyes track some unseen figure, and Hannibal turns to look, mystified as to what it could be that Will is staring at. There is nothing outside as far as he can tell except for the large oak tree that has always sat behind his home and the freshly-mowed lawn.

“Will?” he asks. “What do you see?”

Will’s eyes stare out the glass doors for a moment longer before he jerks away and glances down at the cutting board in front of him.

“Sorry,” he whispers, voice barely audible over the opera music still flowing into the kitchen. “Do…did…did you see anything? In the yard.”

Hannibal looks out the glass doors once more and still sees nothing out of place. “I did not. Would you like me to check the security cameras?”

Will shakes his head. “No. Sorry. I’m probably still half-asleep.”

Hannibal frowns but allows Will to continue preparing the rice cakes without another word.

Dinner is silent, but that is no different than normal, and Will and Hannibal end up back in the office afterward, sharing a small bowl of raspberry sorbet as Will explains why wizards are better than sorcerers with some enthusiasm. Hannibal has no knowledge—or desire to learn more—of the subject, but he feels he could listen to Will describe paint drying on the wall if it meant hearing his boy’s voice so full of passion and fervor. Even his eyes are lit up, reflecting the softly stoked fire that simmers at their side.

“—and it’s not just the collected spells. Wizards study for their powers, and sorcerers can only use whatever magic they are born with. They—”

In a similar manner to what occurred in the kitchen, Will suddenly tenses, and his eyes dart toward the window in the office with an unnerving concentration. Hannibal turns to look out the window and, just like before, sees nothing but the fence separating his home from his neighbors as well as a sliver of the new moon hanging low on the horizon.

“Will?” Hannibal asks. “Did you see something again?”

Will shakes his head slowly, mouth drawing into a frown. “I…it’s nothing. I saw nothing.”

A blatant lie. Hannibal isn’t sure whether to press the boy for answers or simply let him go back to bed and see if this issue is resolved in the morning.

Will answers this dilemma by yawning and stretching his arms. “I think I should go to sleep. Can we go for another walk tomorrow morning?”

“Of course, Mylimasis. You pick our destination this time.”

“You’ll spoil me.”

Hannibal grins. “That is the idea, yes.”

Will huffs and runs a hand through his curls, which never did get brushed. “Goodnight, Hannibal.”

“Goodnight, Will.”

Hannibal watches the boy leave, listening for the sound of footsteps in the hallway above him before reaching into his pocket, drawing out his phone, and opening the security camera app. He looks at each of the cameras placed outside, even rewinding the footage to when he and Will were in the kitchen.

Nothing.

Either Will truly is tired and simply mixing dreams with reality or the boy is hallucinating due to a mental or physical illness, neither of which is good. Hannibal sighs and sits down at the piano, fingers flying over the keys in a soothing rhythm as his mind works out what to do.

It pains him to admit it, but perhaps Will needs to be taken to the hospital. As much as Hannibal wants to provide for his boy in every way possible, he reminds himself—as he told Will not long ago—that there is no shame in asking for help in things that are impossible to accomplish alone. And Hannibal, while an excellent doctor, does not have an MRI machine at his home.

Hannibal sighs and finishes plucking the final notes of the melody he created, unsatisfied with the ending but too worn to try and design a new conclusion to the music's story.

Before bed, Hannibal pleasures himself while taking a shower, imagining Will trembling on his lap for entirely different reasons than learning Italian. Hannibal comes with a quiet groan, watching his spend filter down the drain with the rest of the water, sated but not satisfied.

He thinks of what Mason Verger said yesterday, at the opera. While no one would take Mason's word over Hannibal's, it was still unsettling for a man like him to guess Hannibal's intentions so clearly. Perhaps it was just luck—Mason's deranged mind placing his own desires into Hannibal's mouth. Either way, Hannibal would have to tread carefully if he wanted to keep both Will and his reputation.

And no one—not even god themself—would block his path to Will's heart.

Will is not happy. Hannibal left over an hour ago to attend his first day of training with Bedelia, and Will is bored. Not only bored, but lonely too. It's a horrible combination, but not one Will is familiar with. Lonely and hungry is a combination he's felt so many times, the blend of the two might as well be stamped along the inside of his brain, a familiar route that is slowly getting less and less traffic as he lives with Hannibal. Lonely and cold is another feeling he is used to. But boredom? That is a luxury he has not had for so long he has forgotten that it is even something he could feel.

He sighs and drops the book on Greek mythology he has been (staring at) reading. It's only nine in the morning. The entire day stretches in front of him like a gaping maw, large and empty and Hannibal-less, which is perhaps most frightening of all.

Will drags himself over to the piano and begins plucking out a few notes of the song that Hannibal has been playing of late. The melody is comforting, familiar in a way that some dreams are despite their oddity. Will continues playing until he gets to where Hannibal's melody suddenly drops off, then continues on, adding his own imagination into the song.

Though Will is still a novice, he has watched Hannibal's fingers flying over the keys long enough to recognize certain patterns and chords, and he adds those into his playing until the music coalesces—transforms—into something new.

There's a loud snapping sound, and Will jerks from the piano, turning to face the window. There, outside in the backyard, is the feathered stag.

It stares at him with blazing black eyes, stomping over Hannibal's yard like a raging bull, hooves trampling over fallen leaves and dead twigs. It clomps up to the window and easily peers into the room, breath fogging up the glass.

Will is unable to do anything but stare, shocked at its beauty, its ferocity. Those antlers could so easily tear into his flesh, rend him apart until he was speared on top of the animal like a blood-soaked crown.

And just like before, as suddenly as it appeared, the feathered stag is gone, disappearing from the window like mist evaporating in the morning sun.

Will trembles and goes upstairs to his bedroom, pulling the comforter up to his ears and ignoring the way his body shakes the bed so hard the frame rattles against the floors, no doubt scuffing the polished wood.

When Hannibal eventually comes home, Will is still wrapped in his cocoon of blankets. He hadn't moved the entire day, not to eat or even use the bathroom, too scared the stag would follow him inside the house and attack him while he wasn't looking. Technically, the stag could just as easily attack Will while he was laying in bed, but the warm blankets seemed as impenetrable a shield as any, and Will didn't trust himself to leave their solid fortification.

"Will," Hannibal murmurs.

Will peeks at him from underneath the edge of the comforter, noting the red plaid suit Hannibal is wearing. On anyone else, such a suit would be ridiculous, gaudy, but on Hannibal it merely looks refined, as if he were born wearing a three-piece suit and has kept it on ever since, the suit growing with his body like a second skin.

"You're shaking," Hannibal says. He walks over to the edge of the bed and leans down, resting a cool hand over Will's forehead. "Do you feel unwell?"

Will isn't sure how to respond. He *feels* okay, as well as he ever is, but the stag is making him nervous, afraid, and he doesn't know how to tell Hannibal these things without sounding like he is going insane. Hannibal can't see the feathered stag—as Will discovered yesterday, much to his chagrin—and if Hannibal learned that Will is seeing things that others cannot…no matter how much Hannibal enjoys Will's company, Will is sure this would be the final straw that put him into a mental hospital or into the ground. Permanently.

So he lies. "I, uh, I'm tired. But I'm alright." Will sniffs and forces him to sit so that his back is propped against the headboard. "How was your first day or training?"

Hannibal, unimpressed with the change in subject, sits down on the edge of the bed. Will wishes he were closer, that Will were sitting in Hannibal's lap and curled around the man's neck, breathing in the scent of his expensive cologne and the even more addictive scent of his skin, a musky, woody smell that is unlike anything Will has experienced before.

"It went well. Dr. Du Maurier is…incredibly talented at seeing into the minds of others. It is a fascinating thing to watch."

Will tries to contain the burning jealousy that bubbles up inside his stomach. It is a hard thing to contain, incredibly potent (as most poisonous things are). Will swallows and says, "That's good. You deserve to learn from someone who knows what they are doing."

Hannibal smiles, lips curving into a small grin, pink and plush and *lovely*. "That is very kind of you to say, Mylimasis. I confess, even Dr. Du Maurier's expertise was not enough to keep my mind off of you today."

Will blushes, extremely pleased, and sits up straighter against the headboard. Hannibal is scheduled to go to Dr. Du Maurier's office three days a week for training, with the other four devoted solely to Will.

It's not enough.

Hannibal has been training him, teaching him to be greedy and spoiled and every avaricious thing, and Hannibal has succeeded. Will is *starving* for Hannibal: his all-seeing maroon eyes; his warm, broad hands; the way his slicked-back hair is never out of place; his thick accent and polished words. Everything Hannibal has to offer, Will wants to take, and then some. He wants to devour Hannibal until there is not a single *molecule* of his body left for someone else to try and consume. He wants—

"I noticed you didn't eat the lunch I left. Was it not to your liking?"

Will shakes his head. "Of course not. There is nothing you could make that I wouldn't eat. I was just so tired that I slept all day."

Hannibal preens at Will's words, ego inflated once again in regard to his—justly earned—skill in the kitchen. "I see. Well, it will keep until tomorrow I suppose. I will go prepare dinner. You can join me, though I suggest taking a shower first."

Will's face burns, and he hangs his head. "Sorry. I'm sure I smell terrible from laying in bed all day."

"On the contrary," Hannibal purrs, "you smell good enough to eat. However, I know firsthand how uncomfortable it is for one's skin once sweat begins to dry, and I do not want you to feel anything but at ease while we are making our dinner."

Will's face burns brighter, no doubt the same color as the raspberries Will used to pick deep in the swamps of Louisiana. He coughs, curling his hand into a fist to cover his mouth, and says, "Right. I'll go do that."

Will pulls back the blanket, and Hannibal gets up from the bed. The older man smiles down at him, roving his eyes over Will's body for a second longer than is probably appropriate before going downstairs to the kitchen.

Will grabs a random sweater from his closet, a pair of sweatpants that match (because Hannibal bought every item of clothing in his closet and of course they all *coordinate*) and dashes into the bathroom, closing the door behind him with more force than is probably necessary.

In the shower, Will relaxes underneath the boiling water. The harsh steam makes it hard to breathe, but Will doesn't care, too lost in the euphoria of having hot, clean water at his fingertips anytime he wishes. He allows the water to cascade down his neck, chest, stomach, and thighs, feeling the warmth continue to spread until even his toes feel hot.

Eventually, Will forces himself to turn off the faucet, immediately shivering as the water dripping from his body turns cool in the empty shower, falling to the tile with soft *plinks* . Will grabs a towel from the rack, gives himself a perfunctory once-over, and hangs it back up to dry. By the time he makes it down to the kitchen, all thoughts of the feathered stag are far from his mind.

The next day is spent entirely with Hannibal, and Will gobbles up each minute given to him, still always greedy for more.

After breakfast, they go back to the Rawlings Conservatory, and Will impresses Hannibal by remembering each of the scientific names of the plants they observed on their last visit. Will feels like a plant himself, soaking up the sunshine of Hannibal's praise and allowing it to straighten his spine and cause his head to tilt upwards instead of down.

"You amaze me each and every day, Mylimasis," Hannibal says, voice soft and hushed by the surrounding greenery.

Will blossoms.

The day after that, Hannibal is back with Bedelia. Will sulks around the house, ignoring the feathered stag as it breathes against the windows and stamps its heavy hooves, the sound loud and echoing in the empty rooms. He even manages to heat up his lunch this time before the tiredness in his bones becomes too much to handle, and he goes back upstairs to sleep until Hannibal returns.

On Saturday, Hannibal takes Will shopping again, this time for a "proper fall wardrobe." Will is thoroughly confused because isn't that what Hannibal has bought for him already?

"Are you sure this is necessary?" Will asks (whines) as they browse through row after row of coats. There is every type imaginable hanging from the rack: puffy, feathered—Will refuses to own a coat stuffed with down, the thought of plucking a bird solely for a handful of its feathers is too much for him to handle—wool coats with heavy lapels, trench coats that look like they want to take him to a back alley and sell him drugs.

"Is that your question?" Hannibal asks, swiping through the coats at a pace to rival a snail.

Will does whine then, cutting off the noise as soon as he realizes he let it slip, before breathing out slowly through his nose as Hannibal taught him to do during times of stress. It helps.

Of course it does.

“I mean, I already have a couple of jackets, plus all my sweaters and flannel shirts. This just seems…excessive.”

“Will, my darling boy, you came to me in month-old boxers and a shirt you found next to a dumpster. Forgive me for saying it, but any item of clothing I buy you will seem excessive compared to what you are used to. This errand is as much for you as it is for me. Don’t you want to make me happy?”

“Is that your question,” Will mutters, petulant, ears turning a bright pink.

“It is.”

Will is silent for a moment before whispering, “Yes. I want to make you happy.”

Hannibal beams, and Will has to look away before his retinas burn and his body collapses into a heap of ash.

“I wish to make you happy as well, Mylimasis.”

Will huffs, embarrassed and pleased, and tugs on the sleeves of one of the puffy coats. The silky material is a purple-tinged blue that reminds him of the Wild Blue Phlox flowers that dotted the creek bed he spent so much time at during the spring and summer. The color is… soothing to him. It reminds him of gently flowing water, of freshly-caught trout, of the calm that came with the realization that he survived another winter (and the vivid awareness that he wasn’t sure he cared if he survived again).

“Try it on,” Hannibal says, tugging the coat off its hanger and handing it to Will.

Will grabs the coat and, pointedly refusing to look into the mirror hanging on a nearby wall, pulls on the coat. The material is slick beneath his fingertips, and the color is just as soothing wrapped around his body as it is hanging from the rack.

“It brings out the blue in your eyes,” Hannibal says, voice saccharine sweet, and Will feels his ears turn from pink to red.

“Sure,” Will mumbles. “It’s nice.”

“Then it is yours.” Hannibal takes the coat back from him and takes it to the register along with the other stack of clothing Will and Hannibal (mostly Hannibal) had picked out.

“Are you going to get anything?” Will asks.

Hannibal does not even glance around at the store, his entire focus trained on Will. “No. This trip is solely for you. Well, I suppose the purchases are for you. The pleasure of being here is

entirely mine."

Will rolls his eyes and looks back at the row of coats, not impressed with any of the remaining items now that the blue coat is gone. Will looks back to the register, already missing the coat and, more importantly, the comfort the coat had given him.

Hannibal notices—he always notices—and asks, "Does the coat remind you of something? Your eyes seem almost…distant when you look at it."

"The fabric's color is the same shade as Wild Blue Phlox. The flowers grew near the creek where I sometimes caught fish." That creek bed seems almost sacred in Will's mind, untainted by any other presence but his own. His father never came there, not even at his most desperate, and his father was always desperate. It amused Will—when he was in a mind to be amused and not terribly saddened—that his father was the one who always sought him out despite it being his father who abandoned him in the first place.

"Wild Blue Phlox," Hannibal says, and of course the same words out of Hannibal's mouth sound so much more refined than when Will had said them, transformed from a tedious title into a christening, an elevated rank that only Hannibal could grant. "You do know the common name for those is *wild sweet william*."

Will blushes and turns away from the coats. "I didn't."

"Of course, my wild, sweet William."

Will scrunches up his toes inside of his boots and glances at the register. "Please don't call me that. Are we done here?"

"Your questions today are far less personal than the previous times we've played this game."

Will looks up at Hannibal from under his lashes and responds, "Maybe I just don't find you that interesting."

Hannibal grins back at him, all teeth, and responds, "You will."

Hannibal pays for the purchases and insists on carrying them back to the Bentley, though Will reminds him that he has grown so much stronger this past month and is fully capable of helping. Still, Hannibal refuses the offer, and Will is left to sit inside the car by himself while Hannibal loads the trunk.

At home, Hannibal again takes every bag of clothing inside instead of allowing Will to help.

"Would you like some help in hanging these up?" Hannibal asks, gesturing to the ridiculous pile of bags now littering the floor of Will's bedroom.

Will nods his head, latching on to any excuse for Hannibal to stay in his presence even a moment longer. "That would be nice."

Will has been trying extremely hard to take good care of the clothing Hannibal has gifted him. Sometimes it almost seems wrong—sacrilegious, somehow—to take the items off their

hangers and wear them, Will's sweat and skin dirtying the once-pristine fabric.

They hang up the clothing, eat dinner, and then Hannibal reads to Will in Italian again before bed. Unfortunately (or perhaps fortunately, for Will isn't sure his heart could handle it) Will pulls the piano bench over to the leather armchair rather than sitting in Hannibal's lap while he reads. He is certain that they could have done this the first time with no trouble, but then Will would never have had the experience of falling asleep in Hannibal's embrace, and that is now one of his most cherished memories. It is the memory he brings up in his mind when his other memories, his other thoughts of his past, slide into the forefront of his brain and demand his attention, every trauma he ever experienced on repeat in surround-sound and high-definition. The memory of Hannibal holding Will like something treasured is enough to force those memories back into the recesses of his brain, and Will isn't sure he will ever be able to thank Hannibal enough.

Will is more tired than ever when he slips into bed that night, and he can't tell if it is a dream or reality when he hears Hannibal leave the house around one a.m. He hopes it is a dream; there are very few reasons a man leaves the house at such an hour (at least according to what he learned from the raunchy late-night television he watched while his father was away at night), and the thought of Hannibal slipping out to be with someone else, to *touch* someone else besides Will, is enough to have Will's blood boiling and heart pounding. Eventually though, his tiredness overtakes his anger, and when the morning comes, Will has completely forgotten he heard anything at all.

Swine

Chapter Summary

Hannibal goes hunting.

Hannibal has missed this.

While spending time with Will is fulfilling in every aspect—and there are so *many* aspects of Will to enjoy—there is just no substitute for the thrill of the hunt, the smell of raw fear, the shedding of his person suit as he lets his beast (his true self) take full control of his body.

Hannibal has selected tonight's quarry from his rolodex with more caution than usual, more interested in harvesting meat than having an invigorating chase while catching his prey. With Will now in his home and in his life, Hannibal does not feel the urge, the itch to have his brain stimulated by catching the uncatchable. He is merely hunting for food, not for pleasure. And if the hunt does indeed bring pleasure too, well, Hannibal has always been more hedonistic than most.

Darrell Ledgerwood, the pig chosen for tonight's slaughter, lives in a quaint neighborhood on the south side of town. His house is nestled among towering pines and vinyl siding, barely visible in the thin slice of moon that sits low in the sky.

Hannibal parks one of his many burner cars at the end of the street, zips up his plastic suit, and strides to the house with long, confident steps. In his pocket is a syringe; it is so much easier—and cleaner—to bring his prey back home to his basement and butcher them there rather than disposing of them on-site. The paralytic agent in the syringe guarantees that Darrell will wake up when he is thoroughly secured in Hannibal's basement and already missing most of his organs. If Hannibal were to start slicing into the swine while they remained completely awake without any drugs in their bodies, the fear and adrenaline would sour the meat, causing it to have a bitter aftertaste, and that simply won't do.

His Will deserves only the choicest meat, and Hannibal will provide.

Hannibal walks to the back of Darrell's house, keeping to the shadows, a relatively easy task when there is so little natural light outside and the entire yard is littered with towering trees. The back door is quickly unlocked with a flick of Hannibal's wrist and a credit card slid deftly between the bolt and the doorframe. Once inside, Hannibal creeps along the main hallway, already having memorized the floor plan earlier this week. It truly is amazing what documents an attentive citizen can find through the city's archives, and—unfortunately for Darrell—Hannibal is nothing if not attentive.

There is a loud snore followed by a hideous bout of coughing that has Hannibal longing to clear his own throat. Hannibal walks to the end of the hall and silently opens the bedroom door, peering into the darkened room with ease. The curtains are drawn, and with the moon merely a sliver at this time of month, there is precious little light to be had from the sky. Hannibal's eyes are more than capable of dealing with the dark, easily picking out the king-sized bed and its single occupant.

Darrell Legerwood does not stir as Hannibal creeps over to the bed and slides the needle out from his jacket pocket. It's not until the syringe has been fully inserted into his neck that the swine finally opens his eyes, but by then it is too late. The drug takes effect, the pig's body goes completely slack, and Hannibal easily lifts the body over his shoulder and out of the bedroom. Down the hall they go, through the back door and out to Hannibal's car where the trunk has been prepped with a tarp for protection (as well as a sizable cache of weapons in case the extraction went south).

Hannibal loads the body inside with practiced movements, noting with some amusement just how peaceful it is outside. Not a soul stirs. There are no cars out at this hour, no suspicious neighbors peering through closed blinds, not even a security camera to pick up what otherwise would be missed. All the pigs have gone to bed for the night, secure in their own ignorance, and Hannibal drives back home in nary a rush, content to enjoy the nighttime as it is presented to him.

Getting the pig into the basement takes slightly longer than usual. Hannibal nearly twists his ankle on the top step of the staircase that leads into his basement, too focused on making sure his steps are silent in case Will's sleeping pill has somehow miraculously worn off.

Still, the body is eventually laid onto the sterile metal Hannibal uses for butchering, and Hannibal finally relaxes, rolling his shoulders to zip up his person suit and force the beast to slumber and the surgeon to take over. Preparing meat is a delicate task, and though Hannibal sometimes allows a more…feral approach when the mood suits him, this swine will be given the same treatment he gave Hannibal when Hannibal visited his book store all those months ago.

That is to say, Hannibal will treat him with indifference and perhaps a bit too much force than is strictly necessary.

Hannibal attaches an IV to the pig's arm to ensure any ensuing bloodloss won't dry out the meat before he is finished harvesting. He straps each pliable limb into the leather cuffs that are attached to each side of the table to prevent any movement during the organ removal. He also puts on a pair of nitrile gloves and a surgical mask before grabbing a fresh scalpel from his generous supply.

In a single, smooth motion, Hannibal cuts from the top of the swine's ribs down the abdomen until he reaches the pelvic bone. A few lateral cuts along the external obliques opens the abdominal cavity, and Hannibal reaches inside to harvest the kidneys and liver. Both organs are pink and healthy, and it only takes a moment for Hannibal to remove them from the swine's body before wrapping them in butcher paper and putting them into his freezer.

As Hannibal is reaching back into the abdomen to start removing part of the lower lung, his cellphone begins buzzing against the countertop. Hannibal pauses, puzzled, and briefly considers ignoring the call. However, there are very few people who know the number to his private cell, and fewer still who would venture a call at this hour of the morning.

With a sigh, Hannibal snaps off his gloves and tosses them into the trash. He grabs his cellphone and straightens his spine, peering down at the screen, surprised to see that it is Bedelia who is calling him.

"Hello," he asks, keeping his voice low and gravelly as if he had just awoken and was not currently in the middle of dissecting a body.

"Hannibal. I apologize profusely for calling at this hour, but it is an emergency, and…I need your assistance with something."

Hannibal tilts his head, intrigued. "I would be honored to be of assistance. What is it you require?"

"I'm afraid it is a rather unpleasant task. One of my patients has become deluded as of late; he thinks he and I are in love, and he wishes to elope and move out of the country before the end of the month. I ordered a police detail to keep watch over my home and practice last night, but I fear the patient saw you leaving my office and has come to think of you as a potential…threat for my affections." Bedelia sighs into the phone, voice more worn than Hannibal has ever heard, like a cloth that has been washed again and again until the fabric is more filled with holes than cloth. "I hate to ask it, but could you come to my office building? The police believe that having you here will act as a lure for the patient so they can arrest him. They want to do it as soon as possible."

Hannibal smirks and leans against the counter, hip propped next to the brand-new roll of butcher paper. "You wish to use me as bait?"

Another sigh. "I am as enthusiastic about this plan as you are. Unfortunately, the police seem to think it the best course of action. The sooner this man is in custody, the better for us both."

Hannibal glances at his half-finished project, still sound asleep and properly sutured so it won't bleed out before Hannibal is finished collecting the organs he wishes to use for dinner. Hannibal then looks over to the stairs leading out of the basement, contemplative.

Though he has no interest in serving as a lure, the prospect of meeting a potentially violent patient of Bedelia's is simply too much of an opportunity to let pass. The pig will stay put for now, and Hannibal's basement is so thoroughly sound-proofed that even if the drugs wear off before Hannibal returns, there is no way Will will be able to hear anything amiss.

Decided, Hannibal responds, "I will be there in half an hour. Should I be wearing anything in particular?"

Bedelia relays all the details of the police's plan—not nearly as foolproof or as thorough as it should be, but then Hannibal was always so much better at planning than most—and Hannibal removes his plastic suit, hanging it back up for when he returns. He goes up the

basement steps and closes the false door behind him, walking into the kitchen to write a note for Will in case the boy wakes before Hannibal returns.

The drive over to Bedelia's office building is filled with Bach's *St. Matthew Passion*. Hannibal cracks his window and allows the cool breeze to ruffle his hair and put a light red in his cheeks. To the untrained eye, it will look as though he has been rudely awakened from slumber and merely pulled on a sweater and slacks before rushing to Dr. Du Maurier's office. Fortunately for Hannibal, almost every eye is an untrained one compared to his own thorough gaze, and he has no doubt that his disguise will suffice.

By the time he reaches the building, the clock on his dashboard reads five a.m., and the sun is just beginning to peak up from the eastern horizon. Hannibal gets out from his car with his usual grace and strides over to where a police officer in civilian clothing is waiting just inside the main entrance to Bedelia's building.

"Dr. Lecter," the officer greets. "We appreciate you coming here on such short notice. My name is Officer Hoffson." The man's voice is soft, and his eyes dart warily through the front windows from one end of the parking lot to the other. Hannibal wonders if Bedelia's disturbed patient is already here on property, lurking in one of the many shadows, or if the officer is a novice and cannot contain his anxiety.

Hannibal hopes it is the former. He did come, after all, to see this patient in all his deranged glory, not to babysit a young officer's first foray into the world of protection details.

"Think nothing of it," Hannibal responds, smoothing out a nonexistent wrinkle in his sweater. "I presume Dr. Du Maurier is in her office?"

"Yes, she said you could go up when you arrived." The officer again peers out the window. "I'll wait here in case the patient decides to show up."

"I see. Thank you."

Hannibal walks up two flights of stairs and then down the hall to Bedelia's personal office, noting another police officer standing outside her room. He nods at the officer before knocking on the door and waiting for an answer. Almost immediately, Bedelia opens the door and ushers him inside.

Despite the earliness of the hour, Bedelia looks immaculate as always. Her blonde hair is pulled into a low chignon at the base of her neck, her blouse is properly tucked into her pencil skirt with nary a wrinkle to be seen, and even the smudges of purple beneath her eyes look refined rather than fatigued.

"Hannibal," Bedelia says, walking back to one of the gray couches that line the edge of the room and sitting down with her feet crossed and tucked delicately under her knees. "I must apologize again for bringing you into this mess."

Hannibal takes off his coat and hangs it on a hook near the door, going to sit on the couch opposite Bedelia. "I must admit, when you called to ask for my assistance, this isn't quite what I had imagined."

Bedelia chuckles, tired, and places her hands into her lap. “I wish it weren’t so. This patient —his name is Jason Larue—has been a patient of mine for some time now. I noticed his… delusion in regard to our relationship only a few weeks ago. By then, it seemed to have gotten too far to allow us to continue to have any contact, especially one-on-one. But Jason…”

“Did not appreciate the separation?” Hannibal surmises.

Bedelia sighs and nods her head. “Unfortunately. I didn’t think much of it until yesterday, when I received a rather disturbing letter from him detailing his plans for our escape together to South America. He mentions you in the letter.”

Hannibal tilts his head and leans forward in the chair. “Do you have the letter with you? I would be interested in reading it if possible.”

Bedelia shakes her head. “The letter is at the police station. It was taken in for evidence. I would be happy to show it to you once this entire thing has been resolved.”

“Of course. How long do the police want us to stay here to try and lure Jason to your office?”

“They would like for us to stay at least an hour.” Bedelia’s shoulder slump, and a hint of her tiredness appears like a thin veil coating her face and chest. “Again, I cannot thank you enough for coming on such short notice. Jason called my home this morning around three, and the police concocted this whole scheme not long after.”

“I admit, the idea of meeting this patient in person is…intriguing to me.”

Bedelia’s eyes sharpen as they rove over Hannibal’s body. He makes sure his mask is perfectly in place, the zipper on his person suit fully closed and hidden away. “You were awake when I called. I hope I did not interrupt something.”

Hannibal blinks slowly, surprised (though only slightly) that Bedelia had seen through his disguise. Hannibal allows a hint of resignation to color his voice as he responds, “I sometimes suffer from insomnia. I find it better to sit in my study and read rather than lie in bed, awake and unable to fall back asleep.”

Bedelia nods her head, accepting this answer, and smooths a hand over her skirt.

They spend the next hour talking about various patients of Bedelia’s. Since Hannibal studies with her, there is no patient-confidentiality agreement that either of them have to artfully talk around. Any and all information regarding Bedelia’s clients is allowed to be discussed, and Hannibal enjoys the freedom of learning so much about these people—swine truly in every sense of the word—even if he does not have the ability to treat them himself.

At the end of the hour, the police officer who had been stationed outside the room knocks on the door and then enters. He reeks of cheap coffee and even cheaper cologne, hair mussed from running nervous hands over his scalp again and again.

“It seems as though your patient decided not to bite,” the officer comments, tone aiming for joking but landing somewhere in the realm of worry.

“So it would seem,” Bedelia responds, standing up from the couch. Hannibal follows suit, glancing out a nearby window and enjoying the sun as it stains the sky a brilliant fuchsia.

“Am I free to leave, then?” Hannibal asks. He is disappointed to not have met Jason, but his time with Bedelia was certainly enlightening. If anything, he has learned to be more careful around the woman with her sharp tongue and sharper eyes.

“Yes. I will accompany both of you out to your cars.” The officer turns to leave, and Hannibal and Bedelia follow behind him, both walking with a slight stiffness in their spines. Hannibal’s mind is already wandering to what waits for him at home: more organs to harvest, more meals to prepare, and the sweetest boy in creation to feed each bite.

Downstairs, Officer Hoffson stands from the armchair he had commandeered, nervous energy wafting off of him like fruit that’s been left to rot. Hannibal discreetly sniffs his nose, attempting to cover the atrocious smell with the scent of his own cologne. It only helps the barest amount, enough that Hannibal can breathe through his nose without fearing for the safety of his olfactory nerve.

“Sorry to waste your time,” Officer Hoffson says, squeezing his hands into fists which hang, tense, at his sides. “Guess the guy was too much of a coward to make a move, even with you both here.”

“Is that a professional diagnosis?” Hannibal remarks, and Bedelia looks over at him with a smirk.

The officer stutters, unsure how to respond, and the first officer rolls his eyes and motions to the front door. “Let’s get out of here. I don’t know about you two, but I sure could use a nice, long nap.”

Hannibal nods his head and allows the officers to open the door for him. He breathes in the crisp morning air with relish, pausing at the smell of something…off. He sniffs again, standing to the side so Bedelia can exit, and tries to pinpoint the scent. It is something metallic, but not coppery like blood. Something bitter.

Gunpowder.

Before Hannibal can open his mouth to alert the police, a loud *BANG* echoes in the parking lot, followed immediately by the sound of screaming. Hannibal looks over and sees Officer Hoffson lying on the sidewalk in front of the office building. He is clutching his right arm, attempting to stop the flow of blood that gushes out from underneath his finger and drips to the ground to form a crimson puddle.

Hannibal turns his eyes to scan the parking lot, immediately spotting what can only be Bedelia’s deranged patient standing underneath a streetlamp near the south end of the building. The patient’s arm is still raised, gun held in a single, trembling hand. Underneath the scent of fresh blood and gunpowder, Hannibal can smell the man’s fear. His desperation.

His righteous anger at having his beloved spend time with another man. If Hannibal weren't currently being faced with a loaded gun, he would admire the man's tenacity, his drive to fight for what he believes to be his. Hannibal would do the same (would do so much more) if he believed Will's affections were also straying.

The scent of the man's righteous anger is rather intoxicating in the same way a strong alcohol is both painful in the nose and on the tongue but so wonderfully warm as it slides into the belly.

Hannibal takes a step in front of Bedelia and gestures for her to go back inside the building. The uninjured police officer drops to kneel on the ground in front of his fallen comrade, clutching Officer Hoffson's arm in a vice-like grip—one that is instantly slickened from an outpouring of blood—and using the radio on his shoulder to call for backup and emergency medical.

Hannibal does not go back into the building. He takes a single step forward so that he is parallel to the officers, continuing to stare at the patient.

"Jason," he calls, voice loud but calm, "put down the gun."

"Dr. Lecter," the uninjured officer hisses. "Get back into the building. A squad will be here soon, and until they arrive, you need to be out of Jason's sight."

Hannibal is torn. He has no love for the police or the law, but it is always in his best interest to keep on the right side of law enforcement to keep any suspicion away.

On the other hand, there is no telling when he will have the opportunity to see a mind so twisted and upset as this, where delusions have overcome reality and the only way forward is through bloodshed.

With a sigh, Hannibal turns back toward the building. He has just placed his hand on the doorknob when a second, ear-shattering *BANG* rings out, and the sound of splattering blood and bone follows immediately after.

Bedelia screams from inside the doorway, hands clenched over her gaping mouth, and Hannibal sees in the glass door's reflection that the (previously) uninjured officer is now splayed out on the sidewalk, skull shattered and splashed around the cement like white and red confetti. Officer Hoffson is covered too, blue police uniform now stained with gray and red brain matter, and he quickly passes out, though Hannibal cannot tell if that is from blood loss or shock.

That settles it, then.

Hannibal kneels over the now-unconscious Officer Hoffson and applies pressure to the bullet wound, stopping the flow of blood as much as he is able with only a firm grip. He peers up at Bedelia' patient who has stepped out from the streetlamp and is now only a dozen or so yards from where Hannibal is kneeling.

“You must be Jason,” Hannibal says. He keeps one hand on the officer’s arm and uses the other to slowly trail down the man’s side. His fingers still when they reach the place where Officer Hoffson’s gun is cradled to his belt.

“And you must be Dr. Lecter,” Jason says. His eyes are pinched. Confused. He doesn’t understand why Hannibal is not running away screaming in fear at the sight of so much blood and a gun aiming at his face.

Good. That confusion only serves as a distraction while Hannibal deftly undoes the latch around the gun barrel and slides it into his palm.

“Please,” Hannibal says, voice pleasant as if they were discussing what to have for lunch, “call me Hannibal.”

Jason tilts his head. He lowers his gun the slightest fraction. Hannibal uses his thumb to undo the safety on the officer’s gun which now rests snugly within his hand. “You’re a foreigner,” Jason says, almost more confused than before, as if Hannibal not being born in America is the strangest part of his day so far.

Not the most profound last words that Hannibal has heard, but in Jason’s favor, he has no idea that he is about to die.

“I am,” Hannibal replies, watching as Jason’s gun lowers a millimeter further.

It’s all the window Hannibal needs. In an instant, Hannibal lifts the gun in his hand, aims it at Jason’s head, and pulls the trigger. The resulting gunshot is deafening, and for a moment, the only thing Hannibal can hear is a loud, piercing ringing in his ears. That ringing soon turns into screams—from Officer Hoffson below who is now wide awake—and sirens as the police backup and medical staff finally arrive.

Bedelia comes running out from the building, surprisingly composed after what has just occurred. Hannibal reminds himself he must stop underestimating her if he wishes to continue being her mentee without ending up behind bars.

“Are you injured?” Bedelia asks him, sparing only a passing glance for the officer writhing on the ground.

Hannibal wants to roll his eyes at the man’s theatrics. Really, one would think the officer’s leg had just been severed from his body instead of him having sustained a small, non-fatal gunshot. “No injury. I just hope the ambulance technicians prove competent. Officer Hoffson has lost at least two pints of blood and will need a transplant as soon as possible.”

Bedelia cocks her head and then turns to face the first squad car that pulls up to the curb, tires squealing and leaving marks on the asphalt as it comes to a halting stop. Four officers get out, one going to the dead officer, another two going to Jason’s prone body, and the last coming to stand beside Bedelia and Hannibal.

Hannibal feels his knees start to ache from the cold; the blood from the Officer Hoffson’s wound has soaked into his slacks to the point the material is more liquid than solid. Hannibal

knows there will be no saving this particular pair of trousers, no matter how talented his favorite dry cleaner. His sweater has fared no better, soft cashmere now brittle and stained from dried blood, each movement causing the sticky fabric to scrape against his undershirt in the most unpleasant way.

There's a flurry of movement as the EMTs take over the treatment of the wounded officer, gloved hands sliding underneath Hannibal's blood-soaked palms as a third EMT grabs a neck brace from the ambulance and attaches it beneath the officer's chin.

"Thank you," one of the EMTs remarks, familiar with Hannibal after years of coming in and out of the emergency rooms at John Hopkins. All three of the technicians look slightly starstruck as they carry the officer's body into the ambulance.

Hannibal stands, ignoring the discomfort in his legs and hand, and rolls his shoulders, ready for what will no doubt be a long, tedious morning filled with unnecessary questions and fake sympathies. He sighs, accepts a cleansing wipe for his hands, and cinches his person suit just a little bit tighter around his form.

When Will wakes, it's to cotton in his mouth, an abnormally dry tongue, and a slight headache that grows more and more pronounced as his eyes open and drift to the clock.

Half past seven in the morning.

Will groans and turns his head away from the window, squinting against the slowly brightening sun. He sniffs, wondering what Hannibal has prepared for breakfast today, and is surprised to find no trace of food in the air, only the clean scent of his sheets and the faint smell of lingering shampoo now etched into his pillowcase.

Frowning, Will stumbles from his bed and rubs a hand over his eyes, annoyed at the unsteadiness of his legs as they struggle to take his weight. He feels like a newborn fawn, ankles untested against gravity and wobbling in response to the strain.

Will quickly showers and dresses, interested to see why Hannibal has not made any breakfast. Will pauses on the staircase, one hand on the banister, and wonders what kind of monster he has turned into to demand answers of Hannibal when Hannibal owes him nothing to begin with. Has he become too spoiled? Hannibal is under no obligation to make breakfast for Will. Hannibal is under no obligation to do *anything* for Will. Every act that Hannibal has done for Will since meeting him has been of his own volition because he genuinely *cares* for Will. The thought makes Will's heart skip a beat, and he is glad Hannibal isn't there to see the ridiculous flush that crawls up from his chest and makes its way onto his cheeks.

Will walks down the stairs one at a time, listening closely but hearing no sound from the kitchen. He steps into the empty room, puzzled by Hannibal's absence and annoyed that it is upsetting him so much. Will has lived on his own for years now; he can make his own damn breakfast.

A memory stirs. Will thinks back to last night, to a sudden burning in his body that made it difficult to sleep.

He remembers the garage door opening and closing as Hannibal left in the middle of the night.

Will paces over to the fridge, yanking it open with more force than is necessary. He takes out a carton of fresh eggs as well as an honest-to-god glass container of milk and shredded cheese that looks like it came directly out of a guide to fine dining. When he sets the ingredients on the counter, he notices a small, white piece of paper covered in a steady, flowing script. Will picks up the paper and reads with some difficulty; cursive has always been so much harder to parse than printed letters.

Mylimasis,

If you are reading this, I am still called away on business. Dr. Du Maurier has required my assistance with a particularly difficult patient. I should be home soon. There is plenty of food in the fridge and pantry. Take whatever you wish.

I apologize for not being there when you wake. I promise to make it up to you when I return.

Warmly,

Hannibal

Will feels a strange mixture of anticipation (what does Hannibal mean when he says he will *make it up* to Will when he returns?), sadness (Will is always sad when Hannibal is not by his side), and (most prominently) *jealousy*. Today was for him and Hannibal. Not Bedelia. And yet she has managed to insert herself anyway, stealing Hannibal to her office for "assistance." Was that some kind of code word for fucking? How should Will know? All he knows is that Hannibal left early in the morning, he is not back by eight-thirty, and he has spent the entirety of that time with Bedelia.

Will crumples the note and shoves it back onto the counter, purposely ignoring it as he makes a generous serving of scrambled eggs. He eats standing at the counter, not wanting to eat alone in the dining room with only the macabre skull centerpiece as company. It amazes him that none of Hannibal's acquaintances know of his more violent tendencies when he literally surrounds himself with omens of death.

People really are blind.

Will finishes choking down his eggs (overcooked and not enough cheese to offset the bitter taste of burnt yoke) before washing his plate and setting it on the counter still sopping wet. He refuses to dry it himself. That's *Hannibal's* job, and if Hannibal isn't there to do it, then it simply won't get done.

With a sigh, Will stalks over to the pantry, hoping to find something else to eat that won't require any preparation. Something he can't mess up. Knowing Hannibal, there won't be anything inside the pantry but organic flour, tea leaves handpicked by a cloister of virgin nuns, and a handful of other ingredients Will can't pronounce.

When Will opens the door to the pantry, he is momentarily stunned by just how…vast it is. He has never been inside, always waited as Hannibal collected the ingredients for their meals himself, and now he wonders if Hannibal hadn't let him inside because he was worried that Will would get lost.

There are endless rows of shelves, baskets, and containers, each overflowing with food. Each shelf seems to be categorized by product, with one shelf entirely dedicated to different types of pastas and another filled to the brim with flours in a variety of packages and shapes. Will walks down the rows of shelves, taking in the food with wide eyes, imagining how different his life could have been if he'd had access to even a fraction of the ingredients now stowed away in this room that is (quite possibly) larger than Will's classrooms as a child.

Will pauses at the end of the last row of shelves, noting a strange, dark line on the wall. He lifts a hand and touches the space, surprised when his fingers fall into line (which is really a seam) and push it further apart.

Confused, Will pushes a little further, watching with wonder as the wall slides slightly to the side, revealing even more darkness. With a grunt, Will gives one final push to the wall, surprised when the entire panel of wall slides to the side. The opening reveals a stairwell made of gray, stone steps. The air that blows into his face from the stairs is cold, nearly frigid. Will shivers and bites his bottom lip, unsure what to do.

Hannibal has given him very specific rules, and besides going into Hannibal's bedroom without an invitation, Will has been diligent in following them to the letter. However, none of Hannibal's rules mentioned a secret door or a basement. Is this something that Will isn't supposed to go in? Or is it merely another part of the pantry where Hannibal stores other items that must be kept cool? It's not unreasonable; with the amount of cooking Hannibal does, Will wouldn't be surprised if the man had an entire second house dedicated solely to extra ingredients.

Will looks back out into the kitchen. He sees the crumpled note on the counter. He thinks of Hannibal leaving in the middle of the night. He thinks of waking to an empty house, an empty stomach, and an even emptier heart.

He steps forward.

There is no light switch as far as Will can see, and he stumbles down the steps in complete darkness, eventually finding a light switch once he reaches the bottom. He flicks it on and immediately squints, allowing his eyes to adjust to the unnaturally bright beams of light streaming from overhead.

And…Will is not sure exactly what he was expecting, but it certainly wasn't this.

To his right is a large, domed tunnel, similar to the kind he's seen in adventure movies and fantasy stories. Hanging in front of the tunnel is a series of plastic jackets, each pristine save for one on the end that is covered in blood, tiny maroon flecks that dull the shiny fabric.

To his left, stainless steel countertops—identical to the ones in Hannibal's kitchen—sit gleaming, a roll of brown paper the only thing marring the perfectly sanitized silver chrome.

Large cabinets sit above and below the countertops, and Will cannot even begin to fathom what might be inside. At the end of the cabinets sits a monstrosity of a freezer, large enough to hold the entire carcass of at least three full-grown deer. And speaking of carcass…

Will allows his eyes to finally slide over to the centerpiece of the room, a surgical table made of the same chrome as the countertops. Strapped to the table is an unconscious man, completely naked and sporting several large cuts down his chest and abdomen. One of his cuffed arms is hooked to an IV that drips a clear liquid directly into his veins.

Will swallows.

He blinks.

He takes a step closer.

As he moves, his eyes close for a moment, and that damned pendulum that sits ever-present in his mind swings once, twice. Three times. He opens his eyes again.

I cut a clean line from the tip of the xiphoid process down to the iliac crest, keeping my movements slow and controlled. I am in no rush. My goal is to harvest meat, not cause pain. The swine is thoroughly drugged and will remain so throughout the entire process.

Two cuts across the internal obliques to open the abdomen and reveal the inner organs. The kidneys go first, easily severed and packaged for later consumption. Small, quick stitches to the exit wounds to prevent blood loss.

The meat is healthy, all of the organs clean and free of disease. I am an apex predator, and this swine will feed me and my mate. I am superior in every way, and because of this, I am the only one worthy and capable of owning my boy. This swine's loss will be our gain.

This is my design.

Will stumbles back from the table and clutches at his skull, headache no longer a suggestion of pain and now a full-blown avalanche of agony, one that shatters his brain and splatters the pieces along the inside of his cranium for later clean-up. Will groans and slumps down to his knees, confused and horrified and above all *flattered*.

Hannibal doesn't just kill people. He eats them. And he enjoys every second of it, relishes in the distinction between himself and his prey. The elevation of swine into art through his careful cultivation.

Will thinks back to each and every time Hannibal had called other people "swine." Remembers Hannibal saying his favorite type of meat was pork, speaking with that strange glint in his eye that Will had never understood.

Recalls Hannibal saying Will smelled good enough to eat.

Will shivers, wrapping his arms around his knees and rocking back and forth along the cool stone. The bottoms of his bare feet are so cold they burn, pain licking up the insides of his ankles and flaring over his calves.

Will doesn't know how long he sits there, rocking. Eventually his entire body goes numb from the cold. Even his headache disappears; perhaps the cold has leached into his brain and numbed that, too. Will's emotions swirl inside his numb body, each searching for an outlet, a way to escape his icy form. He pushes away his horror (his flattery) and instead focuses on his confusion, a much safer emotion to dwell on.

And he is confused. Hannibal is a wealthy man, prominent in society and able to buy just about anything he pleases. Why is he eating these people (swine) when he has access to the choicest cuts of meat on earth? When, at a snap of his fingers, he could have the carcass of any animal delivered straight to his doorstep without a second thought?

Will allows his eyes to flick over to the unconscious man only a few feet away. He is nervous to allow Hannibal back inside of his brain, but it seems the only way to get answers. There is no way he is going to ask Hannibal why he eats his kills. Hannibal might tell him while removing his own organs as punishment for going into the basement. (Yet as soon as the thought occurs, Will knows it won't happen. Hannibal killed this swine for *him*. Provided this meat for *him*. Hannibal, while not pleased that Will discovered his secret basement, will no doubt be pleased to finally show off how capable a provider he is to Will).

The cuts on the man's body are clean. The organs removed with care but not reverence. There was no intent to purposely harm, so the organs were not removed as a form of torture. Hannibal is not eating them to honor the man for any particular reason.

No, Hannibal is eating these people because he *can*.

Because everything about him, from his intelligence, to his strength, to his goddamn sense of smell is a gift from nature, a symbol of his elevation above all other living creatures on earth. Will is sure there was a triggering event for Hannibal's cannibalism, no doubt some trauma from his childhood that allowed him to taste human flesh for the first time, but this need to display his superiority would eventually manifest itself no matter what.

Will looks away from the metal table and glances at his toes. They've turned a light blue color, the same shade as Wild Blue Phlox, and Will wants to laugh, to cry, to scream and pound his fists into the stone floor until his hands are nothing but bloody pulps.

How is it that the same man who killed his father is the same one who bought Will a handmade silk coat simply because Will liked the color? How is it that Hannibal can take him to the conservatory on a whim and read to him in Italian while Will is cradled on his lap like something precious and then come downstairs and remove someone's organs for dinner? The two halves of the man—the beast and the person—do not seem to form something coherent, but each part is no less "Hannibal" than the other, and if Will is to survive (to blossom) he is going to need to reconcile the two, and fast.

There's a strange gurgling sound, and Will jumps up to his feet, eyes darting to the man. A man who is no longer unconscious and whose face is scrunching up in agony, mouth open to reveal white, spit-soaked gums. He tries to scream, but the sound is muted, wet, causing a clump of salvia to fly out and drip onto his chin.

Will takes a step closer, horrified and fascinated in equal parts. The man's eyes are clouded, too lost in pain to recognize another person in the room. He tries to shift on the table, but all his abdominal muscles have been cleanly separated. Instead of shifting, he ends up wiggling his head and feet while his chest and stomach remain still, the cuts on his skin welling with fresh blood as his heart rate skyrockets. Will wonders what it would look like, seeing the man's heart exposed to the cool basement air as it frantically pumped, squeezing and contracting like a clenched fist.

Upstairs, Will hears a noise.

Hannibal.

It's too late. Any minute now, Hannibal will walk into the kitchen, see the open pantry door, and find Will in his basement.

His secret basement where he brings people to cut open and eat.

Will is unable to move, frozen next to the man as he continues to writhe like a worm, the only sound coming from his mouth a series of wet, choking gasps that echo around the stone room.

"Will?"

Hannibal's voice seems a world away, almost as if underwater. The sound of Will's name bounces off the empty walls and falls into his ears, mixing with the warbling moans that also fill the room until Will can't distinguish between his own name and the constant choked-off grunts of agony that grow louder and louder by the second.

Will cannot respond, cannot move at all, eyes glued to the blood beading up along the cut flaps of skin on the man's abdomen.

There's a scraping sound, then footsteps in the stairwell, each slow and measured. Deliberate. Will can't tell what Hannibal is feeling through his footsteps. Anger? Pride? Anxiety? The cadence is the same as if the man were walking along the harbor rather than down to harvest another person's organs.

Will forces himself to turn and face his fate, ignoring the writhing behind him.

Hannibal steps into the room, dressed in blood-soaked cashmere and slacks that are more maroon than their original white. His face is completely blank as he stands at the base of the stairs, unmoving.

He and Will stay there, two halves of a broken whole, neither saying a word. Will is proud to note that he is not trembling despite the cold, despite the fear and desperation that is trembling in his veins.

Hannibal takes a step forward. He raises his hands up in the air, and it's so similar to how Hannibal approached him that first night that Will wants to laugh. He doesn't.

Hannibal takes one more step forward, hands still stretched out in front of him. His eyes are the same shade as the blood dried into his sweater. The red looks good on him, Will thinks. It matches the hues of red in his dark hair and the flushed warmth in his olive skin.

“Will,” Hannibal says, and his voice is nearly a whisper.

Will's headache suddenly reappears, and it feels as though his head is splitting in two. Perhaps it is. Perhaps Will is splitting into two different bodies, one that will run away from this basement in horror and the other which will embrace Hannibal for what he is (what he does) and remain in his home, spoiled and cared for and feasting on the flesh of his fellow man.

Content.

“Will, you look…unwell. Would you like to go back upstairs?”

Will’s head reaches new levels of agony. His entire body feels as though it’s been tossed into a vat of boiling oil. It singes his skin and blisters his feet until the flesh has been peeled away and only the burnt husk of his body is left.

“Is that your question?” Will asks, voice slurred.

Then everything goes black.

New Beginnings

Chapter Summary

Hannibal takes Will to the hospital. Their relationship takes an unexpected turn.

Will's head sways back and forth like a snake seducing its prey. His eyes roll backward into his skull, his knees bend, and then all at once his body collapses, crumpling into an untidy heap. Hannibal jumps forward, uncaring of the sudden pain that explodes out from his knees, and catches the boy before he knocks his head into the stone floor.

Will's skin is burning up, heat radiating from every pore. Hannibal scoops the boy into his arms and walks up the stairwell and out of the basement, ignoring the squealing body behind him. The swine can wait. The organs and meat can wait. For now, all that matters is making sure that Will is safe. For if Hannibal were to lose Will so soon after capturing him…the world would burn. And Hannibal would enjoy every second of the slaughter before ending his own life, unable to live without his other half now that he has found it.

"*Ugh* …" Will groans, lids fluttering as his unseeing eyes move back and forth inside of his skull.

Hannibal closes the basement door with a backward kick and takes Will into his office, uncaring if his soiled clothing gets blood on the seat of the armchair. He tucks Will into his lap, nestling Will's head into the curve of his neck, and checks the boy's pulse. 148 beats-per-minute.

Hannibal frowns and strokes Will's back in slow, soothing motions, immediately deciding that as soon as Will wakes, the two of them will be going straight to the hospital.

It does not matter that Will has seen his basement (has seen what Hannibal truly is). It does not matter that Will could end Hannibal's life with a single sentence, could crush his heart with nary a twitch of his finger. The only thing that matters right now is that Will is extremely ill, and Hannibal would rather go to jail, would rather *die* than see Will come to any further harm.

"Will," Hannibal whispers, ignoring the tears that prick against the corners of his eyes. "Will, my wild, sweet boy. Please, wake up."

As if his wish had been heard and answered, Will's neck tilts back and his long, thick lashes flutter open, revealing the most perfect set of blue-green eyes that Hannibal has ever had the privilege of witnessing. If he could only see one thing before his death, Hannibal hopes it is this, Will's gaze burning into his own, the two of them clutching at one another with white-knuckled hands and desperate fingers.

“Hannibal?” Will slurs.

Hannibal only just manages to keep his tears tucked away like the pochette he keeps tucked into the front pocket of his suit. “Will.” Hannibal breathes in that sickly-sweet scent he has grown so used to smelling these past few weeks, allowing the scent to settle on his tongue before finally recognizing the source of the smell.

Encephalitis.

Hannibal sighs, disappointed in himself for not realizing it sooner, and reaches down to stroke a sweat-soaked curl away from Will’s face, enamored when the boy doesn’t flinch away from the touch. “You must be taken to the hospital. I suspect you have encephalitis.”

Will groans and tilts his head back further, revealing the tempting column of his long, pale throat, now flushed a light pink from his fever. “Hospital?”

It seems that Will is only currently capable of forming one-word sentences. Hannibal is overjoyed that he is speaking at all. “Yes, Mylimasis. And I promise, as soon as you are well, you may ask me any and all questions you have about what you have seen. I give you my word. But please, allow me to get you healthy first.” Hannibal clears his throat—he refuses to categorize it as a sniffle—and lifts Will up from the armchair. The boy weighs more now—a full month of eating three nourishing meals a day will do that—and Hannibal relishes the extra effort it takes to carry his boy up the stairs and into Hannibal’s bedroom.

“Am I invited into your room now?” Will asks, slumping against Hannibal’s blue comforter, hands absently running over the fabric.

Hannibal allows himself to stare for a second, capturing the image of Will (finally) in his bed and framing it in his Mind Palace, placing it next to the image of Will—golden and glowing—in his office. If this pattern continues, Hannibal will have an entire art gallery inside his head consisting solely of images of Will to peruse whenever he wishes.

Hannibal could not ask for a more beautiful thing to exist within the confines of his mind.

He reaches down and adjusts Will so that he’s laying against Hannibal’s pillow, curls splayed out over the white fabric like shaved rolls of cinnamon bark resting against freshly fallen snow. “Darling, I have always wanted to invite you in. You simply had to ask. Or, I suppose, faint in my secret basement.”

Will huffs, a broken sound that’s a mixture of pleasure and pain, and Hannibal memorizes the noise and turns it into a worn, wooden flute. He places the flute next to the framed images of Will inside his Mind Palace, running a loving finger over the hollowed wood and listening to the sound once more before leaving. The flute has been used as a devotion to god for thousands of years; it is fitting, then, that inside the chapel of his Mind Palace, Hannibal can worship his own god with a flute that sings with Will's voice.

Hannibal quickly strips off his blood-soaked clothing, throwing them directly into the fire and watching with satisfaction as the evidence of his morning is quickly consumed and turned into ash. He feels Will’s eyes on his body as he goes into the closet and picks out one

of his more subdued three-piece suits to wear to the hospital. He hopes to call as little attention to himself during their visit as possible. If the medical staff aren't entirely focused on Will and returning him to health, Hannibal will personally serve their useless corpses to Will on a silver platter so that they can heal his body in other ways.

When Hannibal returns to the bed, Will is lying perfectly still, a look of agony on his angelic features. "My darling boy, do you feel well enough to stand? It is no issue for me to carry you if need be."

Will sighs and attempts to sit up on the bed, grimacing as soon as he raises his head. He flops back down onto Hannibal's pillow and shuts his eyes in pain. "I…need you to carry me." He's silent for a moment before adding, "Try not to enjoy it too much."

Hannibal smiles, heart effusive that Will is well enough to snark at him. Hannibal adores every aspect of his boy, even (especially) his attitude. "Very well, Mylimasis. I shall try my best." Hannibal reaches over the bed and scoops Will into his arms once more. If the universe were not so cruel, the boy would never leave his arms again; Hannibal would hold Will at all times, would feed him while the boy rested in his lap, would shower them together while Will soaked in the warm water with delight, would bring his boy to the heights of pleasure and then fall asleep with him wrapped up, safe, inside his embrace.

They quickly walk down the stairs, Hannibal reaching out a hand to put in the code for the garage door before opening it and setting Will inside the passenger seat of the Bentley. Will immediately rests his head against the passenger window, eyes closed once more.

The drive to the hospital is silent save for Handel's *Water Music Suite* playing quietly over the radio. Hannibal is near bursting with questions for Will, about what Will saw in the basement and how that has changed his perception of Hannibal. But though Hannibal is a sadist in every sense of the word, he refuses to cause Will unnecessary agony by peppering him with questions when he is clearly hanging on to his consciousness with only the thinnest of threads.

When they are ten minutes from the hospital, Hannibal calls one of the only nurses he trusts with Will's care and asks her to set up a room for him and Will, ordering a comprehensive blood panel as well as an MRI and IV drip. Will doesn't move from his position against the window, neck graceful as it curves and drapes over the chilled glass.

Hannibal can feel the heat radiating from Will's body as his fever spikes, and Hannibal again curses his pride, his reluctance at seeking outside help. Though it is extremely unlikely that Will will experience any lasting trauma from his illness, he is still in pain, pain that Hannibal could have prevented. Hannibal vows to better listen to his instincts in the future; they have never guided him wrong before.

As soon as the Bentley is parked, Hannibal walks around to the other side of the car and lifts Will into his arms, ignoring the boy's muted protests. He carries Will into the emergency entrance of the building and is immediately bombarded by staff; he supposes this was bound to happen. This is his first time he has stepped foot inside Johns Hopkins since the death of his patient, and it seems as though everyone is surprised by his appearance—and the appearance of Will lying limp in his arms.

“Dr. Lecter, I have everything ready. Room 401, just as you asked.”

Hannibal ignores the swarms of lab coats and scrubs, striding with purpose to where Olivia is standing near the elevator. Her black hair is pulled into a tight bun, and there is no mirth on her young face. She is serious, stern, clearly understanding of the gravity of the situation.

It is the reason Hannibal trusts her.

“Thank you, Olivia.” Hannibal carries Will to the elevator, and together the three of them ride up to the fourth floor. Will lets out a small moan at the movement, squirming in Hannibal’s arms in a futile attempt to get away from the sudden change in pressure.

“I’ve got an intravenous immunoglobulin prepared in case it’s autoimmune like you suspect. The MRI machine in room 412 is free for the next two hours. I’ll get the blood sample down to the lab as soon as he’s stable.”

Hannibal tilts his head in acknowledgment of Olivia’s words, shifting Will in his arms as they walk into the empty room prepared for them. He sets Will—gently, tenderly—on the sterile bed, smoothing a hand over Will’s burning forehead.

Together, he and Olivia quickly take a sample of Will’s blood and then prep him for the MRI, careful to remove anything that might have metal from Will’s body before Will is dressed into a surgical gown and then swallowed by the machine. Hannibal hates how much the machine reminds him of some sort of large, synthetic coffin; the idea of Will lying dead inside of a coffin, skin waxy and pale, is enough to have Hannibal’s stomach roiling inside his abdomen.

A technician comes to look at the images of Will’s brain, and neither of them is surprised to find that Hannibal’s diagnosis was correct: autoimmune encephalitis, likely triggered by a virus and exacerbated by the fact that Will is unvaccinated.

“Fascinating,” the technician breathes, clicking on the computer screen with a few rapid taps of his mouse.

Hannibal turns away from the viewing window where he was watching Will get settled into a wheelchair, guided by Olivia’s steady hands, and glances at the screen. He ignores the jealousy that boils inside of his gut at the sight of someone other than *him* touching Will, forcing himself away from those irrational thoughts as his brain slips from jealous beast to collected man.

“What is it?” Hannibal asks.

“It’s his mirror neurons. I know the kid is young, but still, for someone his age to have this many…it’s remarkable. I’ve never seen anything like it, and I’ve been scanning brains for over twenty years.”

Intrigued, Hannibal peers at the black-and-white image of Will’s brain now plastered over the computer screen. Will’s mirror neurons—highlighted by bolded arrows through the

computer's software—are strewn over Will's sulci and gyri, each fold and groove littered with an unnatural amount of the neurons.

Will's empathy. This is it. These tiny, microscopic cells are what make Will what he is, what elevate him above every other swine on earth into something godlike, something able to flay open a person with a single, glancing look. Hannibal feels himself grow hot, wishing he could pry Will's skull open and stroke the boy's dura mater, run his hand across the cerebrum and simply *feel* the power lying beneath his fingertips.

"Print off a hard copy of the scan and then delete it from the archive," Hannibal instructs, straightening his spine and running a hand over his (wrinkle-free) button-down. Though some might see it as unnecessary, Hannibal refuses to allow any pictures, data, or scans of Will's brain to exist save for inside his own mind.

Just as the 2,000 slaves that attended the funeral of Genghis Khan were slaughtered for their knowledge, this technician shall also die to protect the intimate, sacred knowledge he now possesses. This technician will die for Will, and his body will serve its final purpose in nourishing his boy.

Hannibal is already picturing the recipe he will use, the ingredients. Perhaps a platter of *cervella fritte*, each bite hand-fed to Will, the brain of another healing Will's own until he is restored to full health.

The technician nods his head; despite being Hannibal's senior in both years and experience, there is no ambiguity about who is in charge. The technician quickly prints off the scans, deletes the files, and then runs from the room, proverbial tail tucked between his legs.

Hannibal slides the papers under his arms and walks across the hall to Will's room, opening the door without knocking.

Olivia is standing over Will's bed, tucking a thin, oven-warmed blanket around Will's prone form. Will's eyes are open but narrow, barely hanging on to consciousness.

"I shall take it from here. Thank you again, Olivia. Your assistance will not be forgotten."

Olivia blushes and fiddles with the hem of her scrub top. "Of course, Dr. Lecter. Page me if you need anything else." She walks to the door, then stops with her hand on the handle. She glances over to Will before saying, "He is a sweetheart. I'm so glad you two were able to find each other."

Hannibal smiles, allowing a modicum of true happiness to slide over his face. "As am I."

Olivia nods, turns the door handle, then leaves. Hannibal walks over to Will's bed and practically collapses into the nearby chair, allowing his body to rest for the first time in nearly twenty-four hours.

"Hannibal…" Will murmurs, voice soft and parched. Hannibal leans forward, allowing Will's fever-sweet breath to fan over his face.

“Yes, Mylimasis?”

Will’s eyes close, and it takes all of Hannibal’s restraint to not stroke the pale purple skin of Will’s eyelids.

“Sick?” Will asks.

“Yes, you are sick. But there is medicine going into your body as we speak. As soon as you are stable, I am going to take you home and continue your treatment there.”

Hannibal watches Will with unblinking eyes, curious to see if the idea of returning to Hannibal’s home is distressing to the boy.

Will does not look distressed—at least, no more distressed than normal, and the boy constantly seems to be in some form of discomfort, whether physical or emotional. If anything, his body relaxes at Hannibal’s words, shoulders slumping further into the bed, hands unclenching and laying lax at his sides.

Hannibal’s heart skips a single beat, joyful and grateful and ecstatic. As always, Will has exceeded any and all expectations Hannibal has had.

His perfect, wonderful boy.

Hannibal remains a quiet, vigilant presence at Will’s side as the boy slips into a fitful sleep. At one point, Hannibal reaches over and takes one of Will’s hands into his own. Will’s hands are small yet so full of strength, lined with calluses from years surviving in the swamps of Louisiana with only himself to rely on. The skin on the tops of his hands has smoothed from a month of quality food and steady applications of specialty lotion, and Hannibal strokes Will’s knuckles with his thumb, reveling in even this simple touch.

Eventually, Olivia returns with the results from Will’s blood lab (as well as a cup of cheap, overly-strained coffee). As predicted, the lab work confirms both the MRI and Hannibal’s informal diagnosis. Olivia switches out Will’s IV, providing a fresh bag of fluids and medicine, before leaving the room with quiet footsteps and a gentle smile.

When finally Will wakes, Hannibal is still holding his hand, clasping it perhaps more tightly than is comfortable. Will flutters his lashes, glances at where the two of them are touching, and squeezes his hand even tighter.

Hannibal falls in love.

It is not surprising, really, when he thinks about it. It was as though the universe designed Will with Hannibal in mind, crafting the boy with meticulous care so that his jagged edges perfectly aligned with Hannibal’s own, the two of them fitting together into a flawless, singular whole. Will’s empathy, his quiet strength, his beautiful resilience, all of it covers the holes in Hannibal’s heart until it is hard to breathe, to lift his lungs under such a damning weight, such an exquisite pressure that he’s never known before. Hannibal wonders how he managed to live for so long with this emptiness inside of him, without Will there to soothe

the ache within him that has festered and grown like a poisonous flower until Will showed up to clip the thorns and apply a healing balm.

“How do you feel, Mylimasis?” Hannibal asks, voice low and throaty. He is barely able to conceal the tears that glisten at the edges of his lashes, small diamonds sparkling in the low light of the room.

Will, of course, notices anyway. He grips his hand even tighter and frowns, worried. “I’m okay. Are you?”

A single tear splashes down Hannibal’s cheek, landing on his chin and cooling his skin.

I love you he wants to say. To shout. To tell anyone and everyone who has ears to listen and eyes to see. He wants to carve his devotion into a thousand bodies, to rip out his own heart and hand it to Will with trembling hands, useless for anything save beating for the brilliant boy in front of him. He wants—

Hannibal swallows his wants. Instead, he says, “I am well, thank you. I was worried about you. I am incredibly sorry for not noticing your illness sooner. It was irresponsible of me. I must ask that you allow me to make it up to you somehow.”

Will smiles, small and gentle, and the angels in heaven begin to weep, their tears dripping down from the sky and landing like shooting stars on Will’s smooth cheeks. “If not for you, I would still be stranded outside somewhere, probably lying next to a creek, sick and half-dead. You don’t have to apologize. You saved me.”

Hannibal shakes his head. Tears fling out from his eyes and fall onto Will’s blanket. “No, *you* are the one who has saved *me*. Never forget that, Mylimasis.”

Will’s smile shines even brighter. He shakes his own head, curls flying out in a halo around his perfect head. “Fine. We saved each other.” His smile disappears from his face like water melting from a glacier to join the cold, unforgiving sea. “But I do have some…questions. About your basement.” The word basement is whispered with a furtive glance towards the door, as if the FBI might barge in at any second and demand to take both of them into custody at the mere mention of Hannibal’s…extracurricular activities.

Hannibal bows his head, distraught that Will saw the swine before he was ready. Hannibal wishes to always be in control, and for a moment this important to be taken from his grasp is hard for him to accept. Still, he is nothing if not adaptable.

With a roll of his shoulders, Hannibal replies, “Of course. You deserve all that and more. Any question you ask, I will answer.”

Will relaxes against the pillow, accepting Hannibal’s acquiescence to his request with the grace of a god accepting a sacrifice laid at its feet. “We can play our game. You get a question, I get a question.”

Hannibal frowns. “You are sick. I won’t ask you to answer questions when half of your brain is inflamed.”

“I think half of my brain has been inflamed this entire time. That hasn’t stopped you from asking questions before.”

Hannibal can’t help the quirk of his lips. “Incorrigible boy. Fine, we both may ask questions. But the moment you feel tired, I must insist that you rest. The medicine can only do so much on its own.”

Will nods, and Hannibal relaxes back into the—incredibly cheap and uncomfortable—chair.

“Let’s begin.”

Will’s head, while no longer screaming at him in agony, is still reeling with the lingering effects of his illness. The room spins when he moves too fast. Will still forces his body to slowly, carefully sit up so that his back is resting against the wall. Hannibal watches each movement with greedy eyes, gaze never leaving his body. Will feels like preening under the attention, then realizes he’s acting like an idiot and thinks instead of what his first question will be. It is a hard decision when there are so *many* things he wants to ask.

He decides to start with, “Who was that? In your…basement.” The word basement feels taboo, slipping off Will’s tongue like black tar and oozing into the room, darkening the flickering lights and off-white walls.

“Darrell Ledgerwood.” Hannibal provides no other information, and Will stares at him until the man sighs and adds, “He owned a specialty bookstore outside of Baltimore.”

“Owned?” Will asks before realizing that one, it’s not his turn to ask a question, and two, he already knows the answer as soon as the word slips from his mouth. Darrell, if not dead already, will certainly be gone by the time he and Hannibal return home. “Sorry, it’s your turn.”

Hannibal smiles, plush lips quirking up at the corners, and Will wants to stare at those pink lips until he passes out from exhaustion. It’s certainly a better sight than staring out the hospital window until his brain decides to stop working. Again.

“No apology necessary, Mylimasis.” Hannibal pauses before asking, “What is your favorite color?”

Will chokes out a laugh and squints at Hannibal, trying to see if this is some kind of joke. Hannibal’s eyes are open, honest (still glistening with unshed tears, and Will doesn’t think he’s ever seen anything as beautiful as Hannibal’s maroon eyes glittering like rubies as tears slip silently over his defined cheekbones).

“Uh…I’ll have to think about it.” Will closes his eyes, wondering what color will pop into his head and unsurprised when Hannibal’s maroon eyes again reappear in his mind. Will opens his eyes and, cheeks staining pink, answers, “Red. My favorite color is red.”

“A lovely choice.”

Will almost asks Hannibal what his favorite color is before remembering he has much more pressing concerns to discuss first. Hannibal has always been so accommodating to Will's wishes; he has no doubt that he could ask Hannibal his favorite color at any other time and the man would answer him immediately.

"Thanks. Um, why was Darrell in your basement?"

Thanks—or rather *no* thanks—to his empathy, Will already knows the answer to his question, but he is interested to see what Hannibal will say. Will he obscure the truth and lie to Will? Or tell him the entire, damning truth? In a way, this question is a litmus test for all the others Will plans on asking, and whatever color the paper turns when Will pulls it out of the water will show whether Hannibal was serious in saying he would answer (truthfully) all of Will's questions.

"Darrell was a swine that I caught." Hannibal clasps his hands and folds them over his crossed knee. "I hunt. Often." Hannibal finally looks Will in the eyes, and Will is unsurprised to see Hannibal's mask firmly back in place, all traces of tears or emotions wiped clean. "I understand that this may be upsetting to you. Again, I apologize you had to find out in such an…unpleasant manner."

Was there a "pleasant manner" to find out that the man who adopted you is actually a cannibal that enjoys eating the flesh of other humans?

Will bites his tongue—literally. Blood, coppery and sweet, floods the inside of his mouth, keeping Will's next question inside, a liquid barricade.

"Your turn," Will says when Hannibal remains silent.

"So it is." Hannibal unclasps his hands and places his open palms along his thick, muscular thighs. Will forces himself to look away from Hannibal's legs, at the obscene stretch of his bespoke suit as the fabric barely manages to contain the sheer *power* of Hannibal's legs. "If you could travel anywhere in the world, where would it be?"

Will hums and tilts his head back against the cool wall so he isn't tempted to try and sneak another look at Hannibal's thighs. God, he's pathetic.

The question. He needs to focus on the question. But how can he, when Hannibal looks good enough to eat—and the irony of those words is not lost on Will—and there is truly no other place he'd rather be than here, with Hannibal.

"I don't know," Will says. "I've never been anywhere besides Louisiana and here, and I like it here a lot better than there. Maybe not the hospital." Will scrunches up his nose and tries not to blush as he says, "I guess as long as I'm with you, it doesn't really matter where I am."

In a moment of bravery, Will looks over at Hannibal's face to gauge his reaction, unsure of what he'll see.

It's not what he expected.

Hannibal's body is shouting, screaming a single word over and over and over again, and Will would have to be blind not to see it in the softness of Hannibal's gaze, the way his body leans closer to Will as if even a few inches of space is too much, the small curve of his petal-pink lips.

It's love.

Hannibal is in love with him.

Will opens his mouth, but before he can speak, there's a series of rapid knocks on the door before the nurse from before—Olivia, Will remembers—enters the room, a small paper bag clutched in her hand. Will doesn't know whether to curse or praise the timing of her entrance, so instead he remains silent, content to let Hannibal respond to the intrusion.

"I have the medicine you requested. As long as he has plenty of fluids and rest, Will can be discharged as soon as you want."

"Discharged?" Will asks, confused. "But I just got here.

Hannibal quirks an eyebrow. "Will, we've been in the hospital for nearly twelve hours now."

Will's breath stutters, stunned, and Olivia looks down at him with an amused expression. "It's the painkiller in your IV. Makes time get all wonky. Well, that and your brain being swollen."

Will manages to let out a small, broken laugh before Olivia turns to Hannibal. Will tunes out the rest of their conversation, riddled as it is with strange terms and barely-pronounceable anatomy. By the time Olivia grabs a wheelchair that's been folded and tucked near the door, Will has calmed his heart rate which had skyrocketed after looking into Hannibal's eyes.

"Really?" Will asks once Olivia sets the unfolded wheelchair at the side of his bed. "I can walk."

Olivia looks amused. Hannibal less so.

"I must insist, Will," Hannibal says, voice brokering no room for argument.

Will argues anyway. "I'm feeling better. Really." He looks over at the wheelchair, and the worry that he's a burden (that Hannibal's love is conditional only on what Will can give and not what he can take) rears its ugly head within Will's mind, refusing to leave now that the worry has been given even the slightest bit of attention.

"Will, it's either the wheelchair or I carry you. Your choice." Hannibal's voice is calm. Rational. His eyes are dripping with bloody desire, as if he would rather skip both of those options and ravage Will right there on the hospital bed, audience be damned.

Will gulps, body burning—not with fever, but arousal. "Yeah. Fine. Wheelchair."

Olivia, oblivious to the unspoken conversation between Hannibal and Will (and Hannibal did always say that swine were blind, unable to see what he and Hannibal could, or perhaps purposely choosing to look away regardless) gently helps Will out of the bed and into the

cool, thin leather seat of the wheelchair. Hannibal watches Olivia's hands with his mask back in place.

Will can still feel the jealousy, the *possessiveness* radiating from Hannibal's body at the sight of another person touching Will. It flatters Will more than it should. More than is healthy. But then, Will has never been healthy. Why should today be any different? Hannibal may be healing his physical body, but Will's mind has always been broken beyond repair. It's why Hannibal's own mind calls to him so much, so loudly, singing its siren's song to Will and Will's own song answering in return.

Olivia and Hannibal talk again of things that Will cannot even begin to comprehend as Hannibal wheels him into the elevator and then outside the hospital to the Bentley.

Hannibal was right (as usual); it is nighttime now, the day gone, quickly passed behind off-white walls and a dripping IV.

"Good luck," Olivia says, giving him a wave and a friendly smile before going back inside the hospital.

Hannibal opens the passenger door before leaning down and (so gently it *hurts*) lifting Will into his arms, cradling Will's body to his solid chest before depositing him into the seat of the car. Will remains silent as Hannibal fusses over his seatbelt, going so far as to click it into the buckle with a delicate flick of his wrist before running (caressing) a hand down Will's thigh. Will melts under the warm pressure, disappointed when Hannibal pulls away. Hannibal chuckles at Will's frown—Will is most certainly not pouting—and closes the passenger door, walking to the driver's side and sliding into the seat with his usual grace.

"I believe it is my turn to ask a question," Hannibal says, pulling out of the parking lot of the hospital and turning west.

"But you asked about where I wanted to be." Will flushes at the thought of his answer (of Hannibal's subsequent response).

"Yes, and then you asked about your discharge. I'm afraid the rules are quite clear. One question each." Hannibal's body radiates smug amusement, and Will can't help but melt under the heat, slumping down into his chair with a sigh.

"Fine. Ask away."

"You are too kind, Mylimasis." Hannibal turns on his blinker and glances at Will from the corner of his eye. "What did you feel when you saw the basement? What it contained?"

Will jerks, surprised at the question, so different from Hannibal's previous two. He stares out the window and focuses on the passing buildings, the streetlights smearing small patches of light onto the black asphalt, the tiny sliver of moon in the sky.

He thinks of the three emotions that flooded his mind once the pendulum had finally stopped swinging. He looks over at Hannibal, admiring the man's sharp profile, the straight slope of his nose, the cut of his jawline, the pout of his lips.

He thinks that now is the time to be brave.

With a voice far too quiet, Will says, “Confused. Horrified.” He takes a deep breath, lets it out slowly. “Flattered.”

Hannibal lets out a low groan and grips the steering wheel tighter, knuckles white from the pressure. Will flushes at the sound, arousal once again curling inside his belly like a purring kitten laying down to rest.

“You spoil me, Mylimasis.” Hannibal’s voice is sinfully low, filling the car until not an inch of the leather is uncovered from that molasses-thick tone.

Will looks away from Hannibal and back out the window. “I’m just telling the truth.”

“And you spoil me in doing so.”

Will sighs and bites his bottom lip. “Why were you covered in blood when you got home? I read your note. It said you were going to meet Bedelia.” Will remembers the way Dr. Du Maurier's name had been written—so elegantly—in Hannibal’s perfect penmanship. He hates that Hannibal spent time with her, hates that it was *her* name on that note, that Hannibal left so early in the morning for a secret visit instead of coming to Will’s room and seeing *him*, touching *him*, loving *him*.

“Then you already have the answer you seek. Bedelia’s patient, a thoroughly unsettled man in possession of a gun, showed up at her office. The police were there on a protection detail for Bedelia. One of them was shot in the arm, and I assisted in providing a makeshift tourniquet until the EMTs arrived.”

Each sentence is said with a cool, detached calm that Will envies. He doesn’t think he’s ever felt cool or detached in his life, too attuned to others’ zealous emotions and, when there was no one but himself, his own roiling feelings. Even alone, he was still not calm, too hungry or nervous or sad or any other unpleasant thing. Will takes some of Hannibal’s calm and tries it on like a new sweater, admiring the tranquil fabric as it rubs, soft, against his face. The sleeves are too long, and the fabric has a strange, unfamiliar smell, but overall Will settles into the emotion with relative ease.

It’s this sweater (this calm) that allows him to say, “I’m glad you were okay. I thought…”

Hannibal, impatient as always for any piece of Will he can get, each word from Will’s mouth cherished like a precious stone (and if that isn’t the most flattering thing a person has ever thought about Will, he isn’t sure what is), prompts, “You thought…”

“I thought you were hurt.” Will frowns. “I wasn’t sure if the blood was your own or someone else’s. The man…Darrell…I didn’t think it was his blood. The cuts on the body were clean. Precise. So either you had been wounded or the blood was from a different, third person.”

For a moment, Will had rather hoped it was Bedelia’s blood coating Hannibal’s sweater and slacks, but of course the universe wouldn’t hand Will such a gift after already handing him Hannibal.

“Were you worried about me?” Hannibal asks, pulling the Bentley into the garage and quickly walking over to Will’s door before Will can even attempt to open it on his own.

Hannibal lifts Will into his arms, and Will rests his head against Hannibal’s collarbone, enjoying the musky smell of Hannibal’s skin. They had been in the hospital all day, and before that Hannibal had merely changed out of his soiled clothing, not showered. This was the most… *Hannibal* that Hannibal has ever smelled. Will breathes in deeply, feeling drugged —not from the medicine pumping in his veins, but the scent of Hannibal sitting on his tongue and burning the back of his throat.

“Yes, I was worried. I don’t want you to get hurt.”

Hannibal tightens his grip on Will, reaching down with one hand to put in the pin on the garage door before carrying Will inside, up the stairs, and back into the master bedroom. Hannibal lays Will on the comforter with a gentle touch, as if Will were made of glass and a single bump against his skin would cause his body to shatter into a thousand, crystalline pieces.

“Nor I, you, Mylimasis. Please, allow me to take care of you now as I should have before. I would prefer you sleep in here so I can watch over your IV and make sure you are not having any difficulties with your recovery.”

Will smiles and says, “If you want me in your bed, you just have to ask.”

Hannibal freezes, turning to face Will with an unnatural stillness in his spine. His eyes are nearly black in the low light, lips tight and nostrils flaring. Will’s heart races, fear and arousal twining along his torso, two writhing snakes that wrap around his neck and force his breath to come out in short, ragged pants.

“You don’t mean that,” Hannibal whispers. He takes another step closer to the bed until his thighs are brushing against the comforter.

Will wishes Hannibal’s thighs were touching *him*, bracketing his body with a wall of solid, warm muscle.

“I do,” Will whispers back, blushing at his choice of words.

Hannibal shifts, kneeling on the comforter and looming over Will. His body blocks out the weak light from above, casting a black shadow over Will, a shadow that twists into the shape of a monster that wants to *eat*, to *devour*. Hannibal is starving, and Will is a feast just waiting to be partaken of.

“It’s my turn to ask a question,” Will says, wondering when his voice turned so airy, so reedy.

“Ask, Mylimasis,” Hannibal says, and Will knows that in that moment, whatever he asked of Hannibal—if he asked the man to undress, slit his own throat, and then prostrate his bleeding, naked form on the bed for Will to do with as he pleased—he would give it without hesitation.

Lucky for Hannibal, Will is not so cruel a master.

“Kiss me,” he whispers, voice floating from his mouth to hang, gentle and vibrating, in the small space between Hannibal’s face and his own.

Hannibal’s eyes darken and turn completely black, not a single sliver of maroon left shining inside. He licks his lips, and Will follows the wet movement, entranced with the shiny saliva that is left behind on Hannibal’s luscious mouth.

Hannibal leans down. His breath puffs over Will’s face, warm and smelling of bitter coffee and the last vestiges of mint. A slight shift, then Hannibal is only an inch from Will, entire body curving towards Will’s like a plant curves toward the sunlight, thirsty and reaching for nourishment.

Will, ever impatient, tilts his head the last inch and presses his lips to Hannibal’s.

Will…is floating. Even this, the soft, dry press of his mouth against Hannibal’s, is enough to have his head spinning in delight, pleasure coursing through his body so strongly he feels he might pass out from the burning, tingling sensation that races through his torso and down to his groin.

Hannibal groans (or perhaps it’s Will, their mouths so entwined that the sound stays trapped between their two bodies with nowhere to go). Will whines, high and needy, and Hannibal opens his mouth and *licks*, running a hot tongue over Will’s bottom lip, lightly caressing the scabbed marks from where Will is constantly biting down and breaking the skin. It’s hot and wet and not enough.

Will raises a trembling hand and snags it in Hannibal’s hair, delighted at the softness of those dark locks (at the thought of mussing Hannibal’s hair so that anyone who saw him would know that he has just been ravaged). He twists his fingers, tugging Hannibal closer, closer, until they are drinking from one another, supping at each other’s lips like men starved.

Will shivers and lets out another moan, letting Hannibal’s tongue slowly work its way inside his mouth. Hannibal licks his tongue, twining the two of them together, before licking along his upper teeth and reaching, further, into the back of his throat. Hannibal slides his tongue out for a moment before thrusting it violently back inside Will’s mouth, filling him so completely that all he can think, can breathe, can taste is *Hannibal*.

He continues thrusting his tongue back and forth inside Will’s mouth, a mimicry of what Will wants him to do to his body, and the thought of Hannibal inside him in other ways is enough to have Will reaching his other hand up to twine into Hannibal’s hair, forcing the older man to stay perched over Will’s body.

Everything is wet and warm and wonderful and then all too soon Hannibal pulls back, a thin strand of saliva connecting his mouth to Will’s even as he moves away. Will whines at the loss, the sound far too loud in the silent room. Hannibal hushes him, soothes him like one soothes a wounded animal, and Will slumps back against the pillow (Hannibal’s pillow) and allows one final shiver to rack his body, unable to ignore the way it raises goosebumps all along his legs and arms.

“Will,” Hannibal murmurs, and his voice is *wrecked*. His lips are red and swollen, shiny and covered in spit. There’s a bright red flush high on his chiseled cheekbones. His dark hair is in complete disarray, several strands hanging, curled and sweaty, on top of his forehead.

Will admires Hannibal with satisfaction. With pride. *He* did this. He took Hannibal—cool, calm, detached Hannibal—and turned him into a sensual work of art.

“Yes?” Will asks, noting the tremble in his own voice.

Hannibal’s eyes stare at Will’s lips, and the only thing Will can think is he never wants a day to go by without feasting on Hannibal at least once.

Will thinks, for a moment, that Hannibal will say it. Those three words that are sitting, perched, on the end of his tongue, the three words that were thrust so violently into Will’s own mouth only a few seconds before.

Instead, Hannibal says, “You must get some more rest. Are you comfortable?”

Will sighs, luxuriating in the warm arousal that still sits thrumming in his stomach. His erection is full and heavy between his thighs, but he is not embarrassed by it, sure that it will soon go away on its own. The comforter on Hannibal’s bed is as soft as the one on his own, and he runs a delicate hand over the silky fabric, enjoying the touch.

“I am,” Will says.

“Good. I am going to go shower and change. I’ll be back soon.”

Will watches with some trepidation as Hannibal leaves, toned back disappearing as he goes into his bathroom and closes the door behind him. Will wishes he could shower too, but his eyes are already growing heavy, and it seems only a second before he is slipping off to sleep, hand outstretched and reaching toward where Hannibal has disappeared.

Claimed

Chapter Summary

Hannibal helps Will with his recovery.

Hannibal goes into the en suite bathroom and strips out of his suit, folding each article of clothing carefully before placing them onto the spotless granite countertop of his vanity. The suit will need to be dry-cleaned to remove the septic smell of the hospital that has now sunk into the fabric after lingering inside of Will's hospital room for twelve hours.

Hannibal ignores the tingling of his mouth—the still-warm saliva from both him and Will that coats his lips like a shiny gloss—and puts on a pair of sweatpants and a white undershirt. His shower will have to wait; he has a body to dispose of.

Back in the bedroom, Will is fast asleep. Hannibal notices that one of the boy's arms is dangling from the end of the bed, reaching toward the bathroom door where Hannibal had just exited. Love blossoms in Hannibal's chest and nearly blinds him, the bouquet of his affections filling his brain with blood-red carnations and white-orange lilies and, at the center of this magnificent display, a handful of wild sweet williams, each carefully clipped and wreathed around Hannibal's mind like a fitted crown.

Hannibal forces himself to leave his boy, opening the door to the bedroom with nary a sound and slipping down to the basement to see what has become of his swine.

The basement is quiet when Hannibal opens the false wall and makes his way down the stone staircase. He flips on the light switch at the bottom of the steps and sees Darrell—dead—on the metal table in the middle of the room. The man's skin is gray and waxy, small blisters filled with gas and liquid dotting his hands and arms. The smell of decay, of rot, has just begun to appear in the room, and Hannibal immediately walks over to one of his cabinets to grab a gas mask, nitrile gloves, goggles, and a saw.

The process of dismantling a body is slow and arduous. By the time Hannibal has cut the swine's body into small enough pieces to fit inside his vats of acid, his arms are covered in sweat, his muscles ache, and Hannibal is more than ready for his shower.

Quickly, Hannibal disposes of the body and covers the drums of acid, saddened to waste so much meat but knowing that a new swine is easy to procure and his boy's health is paramount to all. Hannibal strips off his used gear and wipes at his glistening forehead with a cotton cloth. The steps out of the basement are taken one at a time with slow, measured steps.

The steps up to his bedroom are agony.

The muscles in his thighs jump and quiver with each movement, now going on forty-eight hours without sleep, without a proper meal. Hannibal muffles the groan that leaves his mouth once he reaches the upper floor, desperate to not disturb Will's sleep.

His shower is both pleasure and pain, the hot water sluicing the remaining sweat and gore from his body while also pounding the tension out of his tight muscles. Hannibal allows himself to luxuriate in the constant, steady stream, washing his hair with his typical meticulous precision, lathering in the shampoo—specifically made for his hair type and color—before washing it out under the spray, watching the bubbles rinse away and disappear down the drain. Conditioner is next, then the same goat's milk soap that Will is so fond of. Hannibal likes that he and his boy smell the same in this way. He purposely ignores the part of his brain that says he is being ridiculous.

Of course he is being ridiculous.

He has never been in love before. The entire experience is new, shiny, like a gem that's been cut and polished and set into a band of gold. Hannibal admires the band of his love and thinks that he would rather cut off his own finger than allow it to be taken from him.

Eventually, Hannibal forces himself to leave the confines of the shower, patting his body dry with a towel and changing into a set of clean pajamas. He makes sure his hair is also dry before going to the bed, unwilling to bring any dampness near Will lest the moisture soak into the pillows and Will catches a chill.

Will is, as always, angelic in his sleep. His mouth is slightly parted, lips open in a moue that Hannibal wants to kiss from his slack lips. His curly hair is sprawled over Hannibal's pillow, his cheeks are slightly flushed from the remainder of his fever, and his body is curled toward the side of the bed where Hannibal usually sleeps as if even now Will's subconscious is reaching toward him, drawn to the scent of Hannibal on the pillows and comforter.

Hannibal lays down next to his boy, utterly besotted, and manages to keep his eyes open just long enough to save this picture of Will—content and peaceful and *divine*—inside a frame in his Mind Palace before succumbing to sleep.

Hannibal manages to sleep for at least six hours before his internal alarm goes off and forces him awake. He sighs, disappointed but not surprised, and slowly opens his bleary eyes, enamored to find Will has shifted in his sleep and is now resting his head on Hannibal's pillow instead of his own.

Will's mouth is open, and a small trail of saliva has dripped down from the corner of his lips to land on Hannibal's pillow. Without hesitation, Hannibal leans over and licks the wetness from the side of Will's mouth, drawing the taste of Will—untainted by any other chemicals or flavors—into his own mouth and savoring it on his tongue as he does with his wines, noting the staleness from sleep as well as the musky undercurrent that is purely *Will*.

Will does not stir, completely dead to the world. Hannibal allows himself one more touch, a tender hand running gently over Will's forehead to brush away an errant curl, before sitting up and going downstairs to prepare breakfast.

Though most of the meat from his hunt was disposed of, Hannibal still has both kidneys and the liver to work with for his cooking this week. He will have to go to the store later today to stock up on groceries, including actual pork. Will's body will need plenty of protein as it heals, and though Hannibal wishes he could provide everything himself, he is not too prideful as to neglect Will's health simply because he dislikes the idea of meat other than that which he has caught and prepared to nourish his boy's body.

Bedelia has taken the week off to recover from the events of yesterday morning. Hannibal has agreed to do the same, though he feels no lasting trauma from what occurred, intrigued rather than disturbed. Still, the impromptu time off coincides perfectly with Will's recovery, and Hannibal plans on staying home for as long as it takes for his boy to be healthy again, unwilling to leave Will's side if there's even the slightest chance that he might be in danger of relapse.

Hannibal turns on the speakers in the kitchen and plays Tchaikovsky's *Symphony Number 6* on low volume. He hums along to the familiar melody as he readies the kidney quiche, mixing in the cut kidney, spinach, and onion before topping the pie with shredded Kaltbach gruyère, allowing the tang of the cheese to settle into the dish before placing it into the oven to cook.

While the quiche is cooking, Hannibal gathers the last of his oranges and squeezes a fresh glass of juice for Will to drink, adding in an extra vitamin packet to the glass and mixing the powder until it fully dissolves. When the food is ready, Hannibal removes the quiche from the oven, allows it to cool for a moment, and then plates it, adding a sprig of parsley on top to finish the presentation. He gathers the plate of food as well as the glass of orange juice and takes both upstairs, balancing the plate on his forearm as he opens the door to his bedroom.

Will is still fast asleep, not having moved a single centimeter since Hannibal went downstairs over an hour ago to begin breakfast. Hannibal smiles and sets the plate on the bedside table, grabbing Will's medication from the paper bag Olivia had given him. Inside the bag is a bottle of pills and an even smaller bag of shots, each to be administered twice a day. Hannibal grabs one of the pills and one of the small needles and sets both next to the plate of food.

"Will," he murmurs, sitting on top of the comforter and reaching over to run a hand through Will's disheveled curls, admiring the reds and golds that glint among the chocolate-colored strands, wishing he had his oil paints so that he could capture the bouquet of shades in Will's hair as it shines in the morning sunlight. "I made you some breakfast."

Will sleeps on, ignorant of Hannibal's words.

Hannibal gently squeezes the boy's bicep, happy to find a thin layer of muscle beneath the skin rather than just bone. "Will, my darling boy, aren't you hungry?"

Will peeks open a single, cerulean eye, glancing up at Hannibal from under thick lashes. "Hungry?" he mumbles, face still buried in the pillow.

"Yes, Mylimasis. I made you quiche and some freshly squeezed juice. I also need to administer your medicine."

Will sighs and drags himself up off the bed, grimacing at the sudden change in gravity before leaning back against the headboard and eyeing the still-steaming quiche.

“What kind of quiche is it?” Will asks, and his voice is no longer somnolent, filled instead with an unidentifiable emotion that sends a shiver down Hannibal’s spine.

“Kidney,” he answers, tongue thick inside of his mouth.

With slow, careful movements, Will reaches over and grabs the plate from off the bedside table. He grips the fork perhaps more harshly than is necessary before stabbing it into the quiche, releasing a cloud of fragrant steam into the air. Will’s nostrils widen, and his eyes darken with hunger.

He looks directly into Hannibal’s eyes as he stabs a piece of chopped kidney onto the tines of his fork and lifts it into his mouth, biting down and chewing without breaking eye contact. He swallows the meat after a moment before licking his lips and gathering another piece of kidney onto his fork. This bite is also eaten while looking at Hannibal, and once he’s done swallowing, Will lets a needy, hungry moan.

Hannibal’s cock throbs inside of his trousers.

The sight of Will *knowingly* eating the meat that Hannibal has killed, prepped, and provided is enough to have all of the blood racing down to his groin, filling his cock until it sits, hot and heavy, against the inside of his boxers. Hannibal does not attempt to hide his arousal, sure that Will would be able to sense it even without seeing the growing bulge that graces the front of Hannibal’s pants.

Hannibal watches Will eat the quiche with greedy eyes, taking the empty plate from the boy and setting it on the table before handing Will his medicine and the glass of juice. Will swallows the pill easily, washing it down with the entire cup of juice before handing the empty cup to Hannibal as well.

“I am afraid the next part of your treatment will not be as comfortable,” Hannibal warns, grabbing the small needle and holding it up for Will to see. “This is a corticosteroid. I will need to administer it twice a day for the rest of the week to ensure there is no lingering swelling inside of your brain.”

Will rolls his eyes and holds out his arm. “I used to stick myself with fishing hooks every day. I think I can handle a tiny needle.”

Hannibal smiles at his brave, beautiful boy, watching with eager anticipation as the needle slides into the delicate skin of Will’s shoulder. It stays there for a moment as Hannibal pushes in the medicine, then easily slides back out, revealing a small drop of blood in its wake. Hannibal leans down and licks up the drop, groaning at the salty taste of Will on his tongue.

Will’s breath hitches at the touch of Hannibal’s tongue against his skin, the scent of his arousal spiking sharp and musky into the air. Hannibal opens his mouth to breathe in the scent deeper, mixing the scent with the coppery taste of blood that still lingers on his tongue.

“Do you need any help going to the restroom?” Hannibal asks once he’s found his voice again, buried as it is beneath the thick desire clogging his throat.

Will burns a brilliant shade of crimson and quickly shakes his head. “No. No, I can go on my own.” As if to prove his point, Will throws aside the comforter with more force than is necessary and jumps down to the bedroom floor, wobbly legs barely able to hold his weight. He staggers to the restroom and pulls the door closed behind him.

Hannibal takes the dirty dishes downstairs, washing and drying them before heading back to the master bedroom. Will is still inside in the bathroom, and Hannibal can hear the shower running, a low hum that delights the primal part of his brain that is always screaming at him to take care of Will.

Hannibal goes into Will’s bedroom and grabs a fresh set of clothing for the boy; the soft gray sweater that Will had worn the day after their first shopping trip as well as a pair of plaid pajama bottoms that would be easy to slip on and off.

Hannibal sits on the bed and waits, his patience rewarded when Will opens the bathroom door only a few moments later. He is wrapped in the same towel that Hannibal had used earlier to dry himself off with, and his entire body is bathed in a cloud of steam. He looks like an angelic figure arriving from the heavens draped in a white robe and floating inside of a cloud. Again, Hannibal wishes he had his oil paints with him so he could paint the scene while it was still made flesh.

He supposes his memory will have to do.

Will blushes when he sees Hannibal waiting for him, no doubt easily able to guess what direction Hannibal’s thoughts have turned at seeing Will’s pale, lithe form dripping in water and only half-covered.

“I brought you some clothing,” Hannibal murmurs, voice like gravel.

Will's embarrassed arousal burns brighter, walking toward Hannibal with slow, stilted steps. When he is standing only a few inches in front of Hannibal, he stops, and Hannibal can smell the scent of his personal shampoo and soap mixed with Will’s arousal, a heady, addicting combination that he wishes he could bottle and apply to his pillow so it was the last thing he smelled every night and the first thing he experienced in the morning (though Hannibal could just have Will in his bed every night and that would accomplish the same goal without any bottled, artificial scent).

Will grabs the clothing and gives Hannibal a smoldering look that nearly turns his body to ash on the spot. With a sway in his hips that Hannibal isn’t sure is only from his illness, Will walks back to the bathroom and shuts the door, cutting off Hannibal’s view.

The rest of the day is spent in and out of bed, Will asleep nearly the entire time save for when he gets up to relieve himself or eat the meals that Hannibal provides. Hannibal is content to sit in the bedroom with Will, reading or drawing or simply staring at his boy, amazed over and over again that he has the privilege of caring for such a perfect creature. That Will is *his*, lying in *his* bed while owning *his* last name and wearing it like a gem-encrusted diadem.

The next day passes in a similar manner, as does the one after that. By the seventh day—the final day of Will's recovery, which Hannibal is both happy with and saddened by—Will is practically vibrating with the need to leave the house. Hannibal is reluctant to let the boy out of his sight (or out of his bed) for even a moment.

"You know," Hannibal says, watching with amusement as Will paces a circle around the dining room table for the fifth time, "there are other ways to burn energy besides going outside."

Will has not mentioned their kiss since it happened, and Hannibal has kept his own lips sealed on the matter, content to let Will set the pace of their relationship. If that kiss was the only one he and the boy ever shared, Hannibal would be respectful of the boy's decision and relieve the kiss inside his mind each and every night, never pleasuring himself except to the thought of his tongue inside Will's delightfully sinful mouth, Will's hands gripping his hair with an intensity that bordered on painful, the taste of Will lingering long after they had parted.

Will stops his pacing and glances over at Hannibal, intrigued and embarrassed. "What do you mean?"

Hannibal gets up from his seat at the table and grabs his plate, empty from the lunch they had just shared. "Tell me Will, what do you know about sex?"

Curiously enough, Will does not blush at the word. Hannibal wonders if, because the boy has lived on his own and rarely interacted with others, he has not picked up on this country's curious reticence to discuss anything relating to intimacy. If so, it is one less bad habit that Hannibal will have to train the boy out of.

Will shrugs and grabs his own empty plate from off the table. "Not much," he admits, walking into the kitchen and over to the sink. He cleans his plate with slow, practiced movements, falling into the comforting routine with ease. "I stopped going to school in the fifth grade, so kids had just started talking about whenever we had some free time. My teachers never talked about it. Neither did my dad."

Will finishes washing his plate and hands it to Hannibal for drying. While Will washes Hannibal's plate, Hannibal asks, "Would you be interested in learning?"

Will drops the plate into the sink, fingers going lax. The plate wobbles around the stainless steel tub without breaking, eventually settling into the bottom of the sudsy water.

"What?" Will chokes out, bright pink blossoming on the tips of his ears. He reaches down and grabs the plate back up, hands trembling the slightest amount. Hannibal breathes deeply, scenting Will's embarrassment and arousal, a drop of fear adding a sour undertone to the bouquet. It might be the headiest combination from the boy that he's smelled yet.

"I could teach you, if you are interested. And if the answer is no, I will not mention it again. My goal is not to make you uncomfortable, Will. I only wish to bring you pleasure."

At the word pleasure, Will's hips make a small, aborted thrust toward the cabinet underneath the sink. Hannibal watches with wonder as Will's pupils dilate until the blue-green of his eyes has been completely swallowed by black. Will finishes washing Hannibal's plate with jerky movements and then hands it to Hannibal to dry, his small, soapy fingers gently caressing Hannibal's own.

Hannibal dries the plate, sets it into the cabinet, and then looks back down at Will. Will, who is staring into the sink as if it might contain the most profound answers of the universe.

"I apologize if this conversation is…distasteful to you. I will let you have some space." Hannibal turns to leave, but before he can take a single step, Will's hand shoots out and grabs his wrist, spreading warm, soapy water onto his skin.

"I want…" Will whispers. He pauses, breathes in deeply, and starts again. "I want that. Very much."

Heat coils in Hannibal's stomach at the whispered words, said in such sweet, dulcet tones that even a siren would be jealous to possess such a voice.

"Will," Hannibal breathes back, running a hand along Will's back and resting it at the base of the boy's spine. He can feel the heat of Will's skin beneath his soft sweater, and Will arches into the touch, perhaps unconscious of the motion. The idea that Will might not even be aware that he is pushing himself into Hannibal's hand like a kitten demanding to be pet is nearly too succulent a thought for Hannibal to stomach. "Would you like me to take you to bed?"

"Please?" Will asks, voice high and thin, floating through the air and landing inside of Hannibal's ear like a butterfly perching on the edges of a delicate petal.

Hannibal groans and scoops Will into his arms, delighting at the squeak Will lets out—and Hannibal is sure the boy will deny making such a sound until the day he dies. Hannibal enjoys the noise immensely, allowing a smile to creep onto his face as he walks up the stairs with ease, not stopping until he deposits Will on top of his bed.

Will is flushed and squirming when Hannibal lets go, a lovely shade of pink dusting his ears and cheeks.

"I could have walked," he whines, petulant.

"You could have," Hannibal agrees, allowing himself a moment to admire the view. "Before we begin, it's important you know that you are allowed to stop whenever you wish. Though we should come up with another word besides *stop* as that may become confusing later on."

Will scrunches up his nose, not understanding what Hannibal means but trusting in Hannibal regardless.

Hannibal falls in love a little bit more.

"Okay. Uh, what word then?"

“Why don’t we just use the word *red* for now. If you say red, I will immediately stop whatever we are doing and check in on you. I give you my word.”

Will nods his head. “You too,” he says. “If you say red, I’ll stop.”

Hannibal sighs, besotted, and leans down over Will, skimming his nose along one of Will’s flushed cheeks. “Last chance to say red before we begin.”

Will is trembling, shaking apart beneath Hannibal’s touch, and they have not even started yet.

Hannibal is going to *devour* his boy.

“I’m okay,” Will whispers. His breath comes out in a soft puff of air. It caresses Hannibal’s ear with warm moisture, and Hannibal shivers, raising his head to look down at Will.

“Very well,” he says. “As you wish.”

Will has no idea what he’s agreed to. What Hannibal is going to do to him. What he is going to end up doing to *himself*. All he knows is that as Hannibal leans back down to connect their mouths together, everything seems to right itself in the world.

Hannibal sucks on his bottom lip, nearly opening up the fading scabs. Will groans at the sucking sensation, feeling all the blood pool into the small area of his lip that is stuck inside Hannibal’s mouth. Hannibal finally releases Will’s lip, and he whines, heart throbbing inside his chest (inside his cock). Hannibal chuckles and shifts so that his thighs are on either side of Will’s waist, bracketing him until he’s surrounded by warm, solid muscle.

“Spoiled boy,” Hannibal says, voice nonsensically adoring.

Will shivers at the sound of Hannibal’s voice and leans into the man’s touch as he slides warm, broad palms underneath Will’s sweater. Hannibal runs his hands up and down Will’s chest, lightly caressing his skin, and Will feels goosebumps erupt over his flesh at the contact, light as it is.

Hannibal leans back down and kisses him again. Will opens his mouth, eager for Hannibal’s tongue to slip inside like it had a week ago, eager for the feel of wet flesh thrusting against his own. Hannibal complies to Will’s silent request, sliding his tongue into Will’s open, waiting mouth. He thrusts his tongue against Will’s own once, twice, before pulling his tongue away and licking at the seams of Will’s mouth, teasing the corners of it with fluttering kisses that burn and tingle.

“Can I undress you?” Hannibal asks, voice unnaturally polite and put-together.

Will moans and nods his head, unable to feel remotely self-conscious, not with the way Hannibal gazes down at his body with a mixture of desire and reverence. Hannibal smiles at his acquiescence and slowly, carefully lifts Will’s sweater off over his head, sliding it down his arms and gently setting it onto the floor.

Hannibal's eyes rove over Will's exposed chest, and Will looks down too, eager to see himself as Hannibal does.

He notices that the flush on his cheeks has spread down his torso, following the line of his abdomen and disappearing into the waistband of his sweatpants. His nipples are red and peaked from the sudden rush of cool air. His ribs, no longer sticking out underneath too-thin skin, move up and down with each of his shuddering breaths.

"Beautiful," Hannibal murmurs, running a hand along Will's stomach and back up to his throat. Will swallows, enamored with the way Hannibal's hand clenches tighter at the movement. Will swallows again, simply to feel the way his air supply nearly cuts off beneath Hannibal's firm palm.

Hannibal eventually releases his throat and slides his hand down to Will's pants, looking up at Will for permission before slipping his hand underneath the waistband and slowly pulling the pants off of Will's legs. The bottoms are discarded to the floor, joining the sweater. Will wonders how often clothes end up on the floor of Hannibal's bedroom.

He doesn't think it's a common occurrence.

Hannibal leans down and presses a soft kiss to Will's belly button, lips caressing the sensitive skin. Will nearly laughs at the ticklish pressure, so different from anything he's ever felt before. Hannibal peers up at him from where his head is bent forwards, eyes shimmering with mirth. He looks back down and continues kissing his way across Will's stomach, first to one hipbone, then the other, lips barely brushing the skin.

When his lips reach Will's boxers, he pauses a final time, looking up at Will once more for permission.

"Yes," Will whispers, suddenly emotional. Hannibal is so kind, so considerate, so *worshipful* of Will. It's enough to have Will's head spinning, a thick fog of arousal and affection mixing together like a powerful drug inside of his brain.

Hannibal smiles up at him and raises both of his hands to Will's boxers, grabbing the waistband and peeling it from Will's groin, both of them watching as Will's erection springs into the air, finally free from its confines.

"Beautiful," Hannibal murmurs again, not looking away from Will's throbbing cock as he drops Will's underwear to the floor.

Will blushes at the praise, watching with awe as Hannibal raises his hand and places it on Will's cock, his palm easily covering the entire thing, not an inch of flesh left uncovered. Will arches into Hannibal's hand, powerful pleasure coursing up his spine at the warm, gentle touch.

"*Hannibal*," he moans, wondering why he has never done this before, never had someone touch him like this (though he knows why, and the answer is he never desired such a thing before Hannibal). It is the most exquisite thing, and Hannibal isn't even *doing* anything, just

resting his palm over Will's cock while Will bucks his hips up and down in short, abrupt gyrations, unable to stop himself from chasing that delicious pleasure.

"That's it," Hannibal coos. "Take your pleasure, my sweet boy. You've earned it."

Will whines, thrusting himself faster and faster into Hannibal's palm. Precum drips from the head of his tiny cock, wetting Hannibal's palm in sticky, clear fluid. The added wetness only increases his pleasure tenfold, and Will thrusts harder, chasing the explosion of bliss he knows is waiting for him at the end of his journey.

Hannibal suddenly pulls his hand away from Will's erection, and before Will can protest the loss, Hannibal replaces it with his mouth, swallowing Will in one single, powerful gulp.

And then he *sucks*.

"Hannibal!" Will screams, coming immediately, thrusting his hips into that tight, warm heat and riding out his orgasm with loud moans. He loses control of his neck and has to lay back against the pillow instead of watching as Hannibal swallows his cum. He can feel as Hannibal licks up and down Will's tiny cock when Will has finally stopped coming, sucking off the remaining drops of semen with a fervor that makes Will lightheaded.

"Oh my god…" Will whispers, throwing an arm across his eyes, the light suddenly far too bright after the fireworks that just exploded inside his head. "That was…"

"Absolutely perfect," Hannibal agrees, sitting up from where he is resting between Will's thighs and running a hand along Will's sensitive stomach which is still trembling up and down, unable to calm or still after so much pleasure.

Will eventually removes the arm draped over his face and glances up at Hannibal. He looks from Hannibal's face—his spit-swollen lips which had just tasted Will's cum like one might savor the last bite of a particularly delicious dessert—down, down his body to where the man's own impressive erection tents his trousers.

"Do you want me to…help?" Will asks, embarrassed by his own lack of experience.

Hannibal grins, all teeth, and shakes his head. "Oh Will, I'm not nearly done with you yet."

Will's eyes widen, surprised. "But. I already came."

Hannibal's grin turns into a smug smirk, one that Will immediately wants to kiss off the man's face simply because it is so insufferably handsome. "The wonderful thing about being young is the near non-existence of a refractory period."

Will furrows his eyebrows, not understanding a word of what Hannibal just said. Then all thoughts leave his brain as Hannibal takes off his own shirt and sets it onto the floor, the blue button-down joining the pile of Will's clothing.

Hannibal is…unfairly handsome. Tanned olive skin shining with a light sheen of sweat. Large, sculpted pectorals smattered with dark chest hair. A defined abdomen, each muscle hard and flexing with every breath that Hannibal takes. A thin trail of black hair that

disappears into the waistband of Hannibal's trousers, tantalizing in a way that Will didn't know hair could be.

Will feels like he could stare all day and still not be satiated, needing to drink in more of Hannibal's body, more of his scent, more of everything having to do with Hannibal until his stomach is finally filled. Hannibal, however, has other plans. He reaches over Will, chest hair brushing against Will's own bare chest—and the difference between the two of them, the difference in their bodies, has never been something that Will has given much thought to, but now it's *all* he can think about, and the thought is making him *burn*—as he grabs a bottle of something from inside the nightstand.

Hannibal leans back, thighs still bracketing Will's waist, and shows him the small, glass bottle.

"This is lubricant," he explains, voice far too calm. "It makes sex easier and more pleasurable. If you are amenable to the idea, I would like to finger you while sucking your nipples. I think you may have another orgasm left in you before we finish today."

Will *squirms* at the dirty, filthy words pouring out of Hannibal's mouth, each said with an air of nonchalance that Will knows is false—he can see the heat radiating from Hannibal's darkened eyes—but the farce of calm on Hannibal's face (in his voice) is still good enough to make Will whine and tremble, undone by what Hannibal is about to do him.

"Yes," he says, arching his back in an attempt to get Hannibal to move faster, touch him sooner. "Please."

"Such a polite boy I have," Hannibal responds, leaning down to suck one of Will's nipples into his waiting mouth.

Will cries out at the sensation, so different from having his cock sucked but still extremely pleasurable. He moans as Hannibal wraps his tongue around Will's nipple, teeth lightly catching on the swollen nub before sucking it again with a harsh, overwhelming pull. He keeps sucking at Will's nipple while he opens the bottle of lubricant. Will watches through a foggy haze of pleasure as Hannibal spreads the shiny, clear liquid onto the fingertips of his right hand, his other hand coming up to rub against Will's rapidly growing erection.

With a slow, steady glide, Hannibal places the tip of his finger inside of Will's ass, gently nudging the outer rim. Will ignores the intrusion, focused still on the mounting pleasure as Hannibal switches from his left nipple to his right.

Hannibal continues pressing in, unyielding, until his entire finger is inside of Will. Will gives the tiniest frown, disappointed. It's not that the finger hurts per se, it's just…there. A slightly awkward intrusion into his body that he hasn't experienced before. Compared to the pleasure that Hannibal has wrung from his cock—and is currently wringing out of his throbbing nipple—Will can't understand why this would be a part of sex that he would enjoy.

And then Hannibal crooks his finger.

"*Ah*," Will cries, arching off the bed, pushing his nipple further into Hannibal's waiting mouth, his body further onto Hannibal's waiting finger.

It feels as though there are sparks where Hannibal is touching him deep inside, shocks of pleasure that stab into Will's stomach and force his hips to roll, to grind down in search of more of that addictive feeling.

Hannibal lifts his mouth from Will's nipple, ignoring Will's whine of displeasure, and grins down at him. "That would be your prostate, my dear. How does it feel?"

Will rolls his hips again, tiny erection thrusting up into empty air before he slides back down onto Hannibal's finger, nearly crying at the jolt of pleasure as Hannibal touches that spot inside of him again.

"Full," Will slurs, unable to form a complete sentence. "So good."

"You open so beautifully for me, Mylimasis. One day I'm going to open you with my fingers, work my cock inside of you inch by inch until you're a squirming, writhing mess, then stuff you so full that every second without me filling you will be empty. Hollow." The entire time he is speaking, Hannibal continues rubbing that damned spot inside of Will, fingers an unrelenting pressure that causes Will to throw his head back and choke on his breath, unable to handle the dual sensations of Hannibal's fingers working inside of him as Hannibal's low, accented voice speaks absolute *filth* inside of his ear.

"I bet you could come from this alone," Hannibal says, voice unbearably calm.

The trembling of his finger inside of Will betrays his arousal, his desire.

Will burns at the thought of coming simply from Hannibal playing with his ass. His erection leaks copious amounts of precum onto his stomach, creating a small puddle that forms a delicious friction whenever Will's cock slides into the clear liquid.

"Hannibal…" Will chokes out, barely able to even say that single word. The pleasure is cresting inside of him higher and higher, smoldering his insides until Will lets another scream and comes again, clenching down on Hannibal's finger and forcing the man to remain inside of him for the entirety of Will's orgasm.

Hannibal continues rubbing until the pleasure turns to pain and Will is arching away from the touch rather than toward it.

"Perfect," Hannibal says. He slips his finger out of Will's (still spasming) ass and runs it through the puddle of cum on Will's stomach. Before Will can blink, Hannibal lifts his covered hand (the one that was just inside of Will) and brings it to his mouth, sucking his finger with the fervor of a starving man brought his first meal in weeks.

Will lets out a weak moan, shivering as a final spark of pleasure runs up his spine at the sight of Hannibal eating his cum.

His eyes begin to droop without his permission, body more lax than Will ever remembers it being, not a single ounce of tension remaining within his muscles.

Hannibal lets out a quiet laugh as Will slumps into the pillows, uncaring that his naked, sweat-drenched body is still on display. The last thing he remembers before passing out is Hannibal running a warm, wet washcloth over his stomach, whispering words of praise in a language that Will can't recognize.

When Will wakes, the light in the room is that of late afternoon, indicating he's slept most of the day away. Will groans and slowly rises, frowning when he realizes Hannibal is not in the room with him. Will would be annoyed at his own neediness, but it's Hannibal's own damn fault; practically every second this past week has been spent together, whether Will was asleep, awake, or somewhere in between. Hannibal has been by his side for so long, it feels empty now whenever Will is alone.

Will forces himself out of the warm bed and blushes when he realizes he is still naked, clothes no longer on the floor but folded into a neat pile on top of the settee at the base of Hannibal's bed. Will walks over to the pile, surprised at the slight ache in his muscles, the tug inside of him where Hannibal had been only a few hours ago. The burn is…pleasant, Will finds. It reminds him of Hannibal, of what Hannibal did to him. The absolute ecstasy Will experienced not once, but *twice* under Hannibal's talented mouth and fingers.

Will feels his dick twitching again at the memories and ignores it, sliding on his sweater and pants before going to find Hannibal.

It's nearly dinner time, but there's no scent of food in the air when Will opens the bedroom door. Will walks down the stairs and goes first into the empty kitchen before backtracking to Hannibal's office. He finds the man sitting in his armchair in front of the fireplace, a glass of red wine in one hand and his cellphone in the other.

"Will," Hannibal greets, voice curling around his name in a way that has Will's heart stuttering inside of his chest. "I just got off the phone with an old friend of mine. She owns a restaurant here in Boston that I have not visited in far too long. How would you feel about going out for dinner? I realize that staying in the house this past week has been hard on you, and while I am sure you would prefer a walk, it is too late now to go down to the harbor."

Will blushes, overcome yet again at Hannibal's thoughtfulness. A single day with Hannibal provides Will with more happiness, more affection, more *love* than every other day of his life before Hannibal combined. "I would like that. Do I need to change?"

Hannibal looks at Will's clothing, allowing his gaze to linger on Will's throat, his lips, before finally returning to Will's eyes. "I think that would be best. I'll go select something suitable from your closet. Our dinner reservation is an hour and a half."

Hannibal gets up from his chair and walks upstairs, Will trailing behind him. Will is disappointed—but not surprised—when Hannibal pulls out one of Will's new suits to wear for dinner.

“Do you need help dressing?” Hannibal asks, looking more than eager to assist. Will smiles at him, so happy he could burst, and nods his head once. He is learning to accept help (to accept Hannibal’s help) and the smile Hannibal gives him in return would put the sun to shame.

Hannibal has Will sit on the edge of the bed, leaning down so that he’s kneeling between Will’s legs. With a slow, deliberate touch, Hannibal grabs the hem of Will’s pants and pulls them off his legs, a tease of what he had done earlier in his bedroom. He folds the pants after they are removed, then takes off Will’s sweater, folding that too and setting it on the ground.

Hannibal grabs a fresh white undershirt and slips that onto Will’s torso, warm hand running over his stomach to smooth the fabric down. Next are the bottoms of Will’s suit, lovingly slid up his calves and thighs before being zipped up over the undershirt. Hannibal caresses every inch of skin before it is covered, his hands softly massaging the muscles of Will’s legs as they are slowly covered in fabric that probably costs more than his father’s old car.

“Stand for me?” Hannibal asks, rising from his knees and holding out a hand for Will to grab. Will flushes at the gesture, feeling like a heroine from one of those old romance novels being asked out onto the ballroom floor. Will slips his hand into Hannibal’s and allows himself to be pulled up, relishing in the heat he feels pouring off of the older man’s body.

Will’s vest and suit jacket are put on next, and Hannibal goes to Will’s closet to retrieve the cuff links he’ll be wearing this evening. The suit is a light cerulean (the same shade as Will’s eyes) and the cuff links are white gold arches inlaid with a variety of different-shaped diamonds. Hannibal easily inserts the cuff links into the sleeves of Will’s suit, running a hand over Will’s wrist before finally pulling away.

“There,” he says, voice oozing pride and adoration. “You look lovely, darling.”

Will smiles, shy, and accepts the compliment with grace, allowing the words to wash over his body like a warm wave that flows from the tips of his ears all the way down to his sock-covered toes.

Hannibal leaves to go get himself dressed (and Will will never understand the difference between the suits Hannibal wears during the day versus the suits Hannibal wears at night) while Will waits inside his bedroom, content to look out the window and admire the sun as it sets, dipping behind a distant horizon.

When Hannibal returns, he is wearing a red plaid suit with a pochette that is the same shade of cerulean as the suit that Will is wearing. No one who sees them tonight will mistake that they are together, and the image fills Will with a strange warmth. The thought that someone loves him enough, is *proud* of him enough to want to be associated with him in public is enough to have butterflies fluttering in his stomach. Their wings beat heavy against his sternum, and it takes all of Will’s self-restraint not to say something (three specific words that he has never said in his life, has never heard anyone say to him) he will regret.

The drive over to the restaurant is silent, Will and Hannibal both staring out the windows of the Bentley in quiet contemplation.

The restaurant is situated at the top of a high-rise building in downtown Baltimore, over seventy floors up on the elevator. Will shifts in his leather oxfords as they exit the car, suddenly wary.

Hannibal (of course) immediately notices his discomfort. “Don't worry, Mylimasis. This will be a much more intimate setting than the opera. I promise there will be no parading around the room this time. Just tasteful food and, hopefully, equally tasteful conversation.”

Will huffs and shoves a curl behind his ear, worrying his bottom lip with his teeth and forcing himself not to bite down and break the thin skin. “Fine. But I’m only here for the food. The conversation is all on you.”

Hannibal grins and tilts his head. “I accept your terms.”

The elevator quickly reaches the seventieth floor, metal doors sliding open to reveal a vaulted ceiling decorated with a grand, glittering chandelier, marble tile floors polished to mirror-like shine, a group of musicians playing soft music, and dozens of tables, each filled with glittering and shining patrons. The room is so large that Will cannot see where it stops; it merely disappears into the shadows around the edges, as if the tables and tile were melting into the ether rather than ending.

Will bites down and allows his lower lip to bleed, sucking on the fresh wound with relish, allowing the pain (the taste of blood) to soothe him.

“*Bonjour Hannibal*!” a booming voice greets, and Hannibal and Will turn to find a large, portly woman with more facial hair than Hannibal making her way from across the room. Each of the guests watches her as she approaches them, and Will burns with embarrassment, wishing he could hide behind Hannibal—or, better yet, slip back into the elevator and then run the rest of the way home, never to leave the house again unless it was to a purely *empty* venue.

“*Bonjour Kassity*,” Hannibal responds, voice smooth like melted chocolate, each syllable dripping from his mouth to land on the unforgiving tile. “*Je suis tellement contente de te revoir enfin*.”

The woman grins, lips spreading across her entire face, and then glances down at Will. “*Bonjour jeune homme. Qui es-tu?* ”

Will sighs, straightens his spine, and replies, “*Je m'appelle Will. C'est un plaisir de vous rencontrer.* ”

If Hannibal’s words and accent were like smooth chocolate, Will’s are akin to sour milk, full of bumps that linger and leave a bitter aftertaste.

Hannibal looks down at Will, and all the lingering embarrassment and shame in Will’s body is thrust aside to make way for the *desire*, the *hunger* that radiates from Hannibal far brighter than the glittering chandelier overhead.

Will blushes and glances down at his shoes, tuning out the rest of Hannibal's and Kassity's conversation. Eventually, Hannibal graces Kassity with a final thank you and then places his broad palm at the base of Will's spine, hand so large it spans the entirety of Will's back. It comforts Will, the size of Hannibal, the way his body (his presence) fills all of Will's senses whenever they are together.

He lets Hannibal guide him to their seats at a small, round table topped with a white tablecloth and candlesticks. It's a romantic setting.

Intimate.

Will flushes when Hannibal pulls out his seat, thanking the man with a quiet, "*Merci*," enjoying (no doubt more than is healthy) the way Hannibal's eyes darken at the soft-spoken word.

As Hannibal pulls out his own seat, there's a stuttered cough, then a loud, brash, "Hannibal!" Both Hannibal's and Will's eyes widen at the sudden noise.

Will turns his head, stomach plummeting at the familiar voice. There, seated only a few tables away, is Mason Verger.

And he looks far too pleased to see them.

Progeny

Chapter Summary

Hannibal and Will continue to navigate their changed relationship.

“Mr. Verger,” Hannibal greets, svelte voice smoothing over the awkwardness of Mason’s intrusion. If the man were not half as wealthy and powerful as he was, he would have been thrust out of Baltimore’s upper echelon long ago for his lack of social graces. As it stands, Hannibal has appearances to maintain, and though he would rather pluck out his own fingernails than have another conversation with Mason—to watch Mason speak to Will in that disgustingly suggestive tone that makes Hannibal want to rip out the man’s tongue and feed it to the pigs he bred—there is nothing Hannibal can do at the moment but try and keep this interaction as brief and painless as possible.

He has promised Will tasteful conversation after all.

“I see you are showing off your prize once more,” Mason leers, looking down at Will with blatant desire. Hannibal wants to growl, to rip off his person suit, to shove his dinner knife deep into Mason’s neck and slice open the carotid artery until the tablecloth is stained a deep maroon and Mason never spoke again.

“I enjoy introducing Will to my acquaintances,” Hannibal responds, vacillating his attention between Will (who is ducking his head and staring a hole into his empty plate) and Mason (who is looming over their private table and reeks of expensive cologne and, beneath that, the stench of swine).

“I’m sure you do,” Mason says. He sucks on his thumb, popping it from his mouth with a loud, irritating noise and then pointing the glistening digit at Will. “My Margot doesn’t seem to like meeting my friends nearly as much. Ah, well, what can you do. She might be too… preoccupied to leave the house soon enough anyway.”

Hannibal swallows, trying to force his distaste down and finding it harder and harder to do so the longer Mason stands at their table. “I see. I hope she will not be preoccupied for too long. She is always a pleasure to be around.”

“She is certainly a pleasure,” Mason says, grinning and finally looking at Hannibal when Will refuses to glance up from his plate. Hannibal keeps his own smile inside, delighted at how petty Will is by refusing to give his attention to those he deems unworthy.

“Is she here with you tonight?” Hannibal asks, uncaring of the answer. Margot Verger is interesting in the way that a trapped, dying animal is interesting; Hannibal watches as Margot chews on her own leg, teeth breaking through flesh and bone in an attempt to escape, and

wonders with idle curiosity if she will survive the amputation or if she will be shot by her brother before the separation is complete.

“No, not tonight.” Mason gives no further explanation, and Hannibal does not ask for one.

In the distance, a tuxedoed waiter hovers, poised, unsure of how to proceed. No doubt he has been trained to not interrupt patrons while they speak, but he is still clearly desperate to provide Hannibal with a drink before Kassity becomes upset and fires him for not taking care of her special guests.

“Please send her our regards,” Hannibal says, hoping that Mason will pick up on his (not-so-subtle) social cue and see the sentence for what it is; an end to the conversation.

He does not.

“You should visit Muskrat Farms.” Mason looks back over to Will and licks his lips, leaving them shining and slick. “I let the orphans come over all the time. The kiddos love the animals, and I love the kids.”

Hannibal shudders at the thought of being in the same *county* as Muskrat Farms, let alone stepping foot onto the property. The smell of hundreds of thousands of swine would be so overwhelming as to destroy Hannibal’s olfactory nerve before he even set foot out of the car. And for Will to be even closer to Mason, for Mason to even *think* about touching his boy…

“An interesting proposition,” Hannibal murmurs. “We will have to have some time to consider it. Will is recovering from an illness at the moment, so I am afraid any visit we may make will have to wait.”

“Fine, fine,” Mason says, shoving his hands into his pockets. “Any time is a good time. I hope to see you again soon.” With one last leering glance, Mason walks away from their table and heads to the back of the restaurant, stopping to sit down in a more secluded corner of the room where a small group of well-dressed men sit, uncomfortable, no doubt waiting for the return of Mason before concluding their (no doubt unpleasant) business.

“He is gone,” Hannibal tells Will, voice low. “I apologize for his presence yet again. I did not imagine we would have the unfortunate luck of running into him a second time.”

Will slowly lifts his head and peeks at Hannibal from beneath his thick, black eyelashes. “Why do you put up with him? Why does anybody?”

Hannibal watches the waiter finally approach and pauses their conversation.

“Good evening,” the man says, voice trembling the slightest amount. A fine sheen of sweat coats his forehead, and the smell of his nervous anxiety nearly overpowers the scent of his off-brand deodorant. “Kassity sends her regards. She said both of your meals would be provided by her tonight, and she refuses to accept any payment for the food.”

Hannibal barely manages to hold back a sneeze as he replies, “That is most kind of our host. What is Kassity serving tonight?”

The man twitches, nearly flinching under the weight of Hannibal's gaze. Pathetic. "*Confit de canard*, served with a *concombre a la menthe*."

"Wonderful," Hannibal responds. "That will pair nicely with a 2008 *Chateu Petrus*, I think." The thyme in the *confit* and the mint in the *concombre a la menthe* would both enhance the flavor of the red wine.

The man's eyes widen to ridiculous proportions that would look better suited on a cartoon character. "Of…of course. Thank you."

With a ridiculous bobble of his head, the waiter scampers back into the kitchen, and Hannibal relaxes the slightest amount in his chair.

Hannibal glances over at Will and sees the humor swimming amongst the blue of the boy's eyes, enhanced by the low light of the candles.

"You scare him," Will says, lips turning up into a slight smile. "And you like that you scare him."

"It is always good to have a healthy respect for one's superiors," Hannibal replies, folding his hands and placing them in his lap.

Will rolls his eyes, and Hannibal wants to sigh, to laugh, to do *something* to relieve the aching pressure of love that sits, heavy, inside of his chest. "Sure, whatever you say."

The waiter comes back with the bottle of wine and gently unscrews the cork from inside the top, pouring a healthy amount of wine into Hannibal's empty glass before setting the bottle back into the procured bucket of ice. Hannibal lifts his glass, swirls the crimson liquid to allow it to breathe, and then takes a single, delicate sip, noting the hints of cherry, raspberry, and plum that settle on his tongue.

"Can I have a sip?" Will asks.

Hannibal looks at him, curious. Will has never asked for alcohol before, though Hannibal pairs almost each one of his meals with some kind of wine or liquor. For Will to ask now, while they are both in public and Will is obviously underage, must be for a reason. A test, perhaps?

Hannibal peers harder into Will's eyes, searching for the answer, surprised to find a hint of anxiety there. Not from asking the question, but because Will is worried Hannibal will…say yes?

Ah, his wild, sweet boy. Will sees Hannibal's affection and worries it will drown out all else, even common sense. If Hannibal allows Will this wine, what is to stop Hannibal from giving Will other things that might be harmful to him? What's to stop Will from harming himself if not for Hannibal there to stop him and guide him in the right direction? Will does not care about wine; he cares about having someone who can save him, even from himself.

"No, my darling boy. Not tonight."

Will slumps back into his chair, pleased, and Hannibal wants to purr. Such a clever thing, his boy.

They sit in silence for a moment before Will asks, “You never answered my question about Mason. Why do people put up with him?”

Hannibal takes another small sip of wine, allowing it to linger on his palette for a moment before swallowing. He says, “Mason is the heir to one of the wealthiest companies in the United States. Not just wealthy; powerful, too. With such wealth and power comes the ability to trample any sort of social norms. People will put up with almost anything if it comes with a large enough price tag at the end.”

Will snorts and folds his arms over his chest. “I don’t like him.”

“Nor do I. Mason is discourteous. Discourtesy is unspeakably ugly to me.”

Will smiles, a strange glint in his eye, and says, “Have you thought about eating him?”

With a solemn enough voice to command the very shades of Hell, Hannibal responds, “When feasible, one should eat the rude.”

Will explodes into a fit of giggles, and Hannibal smiles along, utterly besotted and unable to do anything but watch the most beautiful creature on earth laugh at his morbid humor.

Hannibal basks in Will’s happiness (in Will in general), and the rest of the dinner goes far more smoothly than the start. By the time they are back inside the Bentley driving home, Will is pressed once more to the glass of the window, eyes slowly slipping shut.

“I’m still so tired,” Will says (whines).

“You are still recovering from a life-threatening illness, Mylimasis. You must allow your body time to heal.”

“But I want to spend time with you.” Will’s breath fogs up the window, obscuring the outside world. “You’re going back to Bedelia’s tomorrow. I’ll be all alone.”

“You are never alone, Will. I am always with you, even when we are apart.”

Will sighs and stretches his legs until they hit the underside of the dashboard. “I still like it better when you’re home.”

“As do I.”

Hannibal parks the car and helps Will inside, ignoring the boy’s protests. When they reach the upstairs, Will looks first at his own bedroom, then shyly at Hannibal’s before asking, “Can I spend the night with you? I know I’m probably okay to be on my own, but…”

“Darling, I would be honored if you spent every remaining night in my bed.”

Will blushes and tugs on the sleeves of his suit jacket. “Okay,” he whispers, voice echoing in the empty hallway. “I’d like that.”

Hannibal smiles and leans down to press a gentle kiss against Will’s forehead, amazed at how soft and smooth the skin is beneath his lips. “Then it shall be done. I’ll move your clothing into my closet tomorrow evening once I return from work. For now, why don’t you grab a pair of pajamas for the night and then meet me in *our* bedroom.”

Will blush deepens, and he nods his head before going into the guest room, leaving Hannibal bereft, even if it is for a just short moment. He wonders how he will get through the day tomorrow now that he has spent the past week exclusively in Will’s presence.

As it turns out, he does manage to survive the day with Bedelia, but only barely. He meanders through the day slowly, each minute a small eternity as he waits for the moment he can return home to his boy. If Bedelia notices the lackadaisical nature of his attention that day, she kindly does not comment on it. By the time five o’clock arrives, Hannibal is practically vibrating out of his person suit, eager to rush home and simply feast on his boy until his hunger is finally, *finally* satiated.

When he gets home, he expects Will to be there to greet him.

He does not expect Will to greet him at the garage door wearing nothing but one of Hannibal’s white undershirts and a pair of black boxers which are far too tight now that Will has gained some weight (the way they curve around the boy’s thighs and tightly cup the boy’s perky ass is simply *obscene*).

“Will,” Hannibal croaks, unable to say anything else.

“Hannibal,” Will replies, dark eyes landing on Hannibal’s face (his mouth) with a hunger that is intoxicating to witness.

Without another word, Will launches himself into Hannibal’s embrace, wrapping his lithe arms around Hannibal’s neck and pulling Hannibal into a wet, messy kiss. Hannibal moans into the embrace, reaching his tongue out to twine it with Will’s, thrusting his tongue into that warm heat with as much force as he can and delighting in Will’s subsequent whine.

They stay like that for a moment, Will’s arms around Hannibal’s neck, his legs wrapped around Hannibal’s waist. Hannibal can feel Will’s adorably small erection poking into his stomach, and he reaches a hand down to grab at Will’s pert ass, encouraging the boy to push harder against him. Will sighs into their kiss and starts to move his hips against Hannibal’s stomach, grinding his erection into the firm muscles of Hannibal’s abdomen.

Hannibal grips his hand tighter against Will’s ass and wraps his other arm around Will’s waist, slowly walking toward the staircase without breaking their kiss. Will seems unaware that they are moving. His tongue continues licking along Hannibal’s lips, his teeth, his tongue, dripping saliva until Hannibal’s mouth is thoroughly coated, not an inch of skin left unscathed.

Hannibal quickly makes his way up the stairs, easily carrying Will's small body over each step. By the time they reach the master bedroom—their bedroom, and Hannibal shudders at the wonderful thought—Will is panting against Hannibal's mouth, taking in deep, gulping breaths that he releases in small puffs against Hannibal's lips. Hannibal drinks in the warm, moist air with a greedy inhale, delighting in the scent of him and Will together.

Inside the bedroom, Hannibal gently deposits Will onto the comforter, immediately regretting the loss of Will's limbs wrapped up around his own.

"Do you remember your word?" Hannibal asks, voice far too breathless.

Will shudders and nods his head. "Yes. Red if I don't like anything and want you to stop."

"Good boy," Hannibal praises, and Will's pupils dilate further at the approval. His eyes are completely black, animal-like in their appearance, and Hannibal wants to stroke his hands over the boy's precious cornea, run a fingertip along Will's lens, entranced with the very thing that allows Will to *see* as no other has (and no other will). Instead, Hannibal runs his hands through Will's buttery-soft curls, in love with the way Will arches into the gentle pressure, so desperate for any kind touch, even something as simple as this.

Hannibal—with some effort—removes his hands from Will's hair and leans back on the bed, resting his body on his knees. He asks, "May I remove your clothing?" With a wry grin, he adds, "Little that it is."

Will flushes a dark red and nods his head.

As Hannibal takes his own shirt from off of Will—enamored with the way the white fabric hangs loosely around Will's torso and rests against his upper thighs—he says, "I must confess, if I had known what awaited me upon my return, I might have been tempted to end my day a little earlier."

With Will's (his) shirt gone and only the pair of ridiculously tight boxers left to afford Will some modicum of modesty, Hannibal allows his gaze to roam over the boy, drinking in the delicious sight of him. His hair is mussed from taking off the shirt, chocolate curls splayed out in every direction and resting gently around his slight ears. The blush on Will's cheeks spreads down his neck, across his torso, and ends at the waistband of his boxers, a red tease that sets Hannibal's blood boiling. Will's otherwise pale skin is smooth and shiny, covered in a light sheen of sweat. There is a smattering of freckles along the bridge of his nose and the tops of his shoulders, no doubt from summers spent outdoors without a shirt.

"You are simply stunning, Mylimasis," Hannibal breathes. "If I could spend all my time gazing upon your perfect form, I still would be left unsatiated. No amount of time available in this mortal realm is enough to properly enjoy your beauty."

Will visibly squirms at the words, flush darkening from red to a light purple. Hannibal smirks and slides his fingers under the waistband of Will's boxers, slowly peeling them from the boy's groin, unwrapping a present that is solely for him. Hannibal relishes the way Will's tiny, adorable cock bounces up as soon as the black fabric is removed, curving towards Will's flat stomach without touching.

Hannibal leans over and places the boxers onto the floor, forcing himself to leave the clothing in a heap rather than taking the time to put it into one of the clothing hampers in his closet or bathroom. Will is more important at the moment, and though it pains Hannibal to leave a mess in the bedroom (even for a short amount of time) it pains him even more to imagine leaving Will's side when he is splayed so beautifully before Hannibal, fully nude and glowing like an angelic statue that has been caught in the last rays of a brilliant setting sun.

Hannibal lifts up a hand and strokes it down Will's torso, admiring the way his skin and muscles tremble under the light touch. When he reaches Will's erection, he skims his palm over the hot, tender flesh, giving it a few strokes before bringing his palm to his mouth and licking a broad stripe from the base of his wrist up to his fingertips. He moans at the salty, bitter taste of Will's precum, his own erection throbbing in response to the flavor.

"You taste exquisite, Mylimasis," Hannibal says, reaching down again with his wet palm and wrapping it around Will's cock. Hannibal is enchanted with Will's cock, from the fact that it is only a few inches long (nearly a third of the length of Hannibal's own erection) and barely a handful for him to grab; his hand easily swallows the entire thing, not even the foreskin able to peek out when Hannibal covers Will's cock with his palm.

"*Hannibal*," Will whines, hips thrusting up into his wet palm. Will's cock drags back and forth in short, sharp thrusts, and Hannibal watches with greedy eyes as his boy takes his pleasure. Pleasure which Hannibal is more than happy to provide.

"Is this alright?" Hannibal asks, already knowing the answer but wanting Will to become familiar with people asking for his permission, his consent, before doing something to him.

"Yes!" Will cries, throwing his head back into the pillow. "Yes, yes, yes it's so good."

Will begins to thrust faster, lifting his hips from the bed in jerky movements and sliding his cock along the inside of Hannibal's palm. Hannibal licks his lips, entranced with the image Will that presents before him. He falls in love with the wet *schlick schlick schlick* as Will's cock, now dripping copious amounts of precum, rubs faster and faster against his hand.

Before Will can reach his peak, Hannibal pulls his hand away, ignoring the sharp whine that Will lets out at the loss of contact. Will's small, bony hips continue thrusting into the empty air, seeking a sensation that is no longer there.

"Hannibal?" Will asks, voice reedy and light. "Why…"

"I wish to taste you today, Will," Hannibal responds in an egregiously husky tone.

Will quickly nods his head, willing to give away anything that Hannibal might want in order to reach his orgasm. "Sure. Yeah. Go ahead.

Hannibal grins, teeth gleaming in the low light of the bedroom, and bends his head down. He delights in Will's confused noise when he bypasses Will's small cock and instead grabs the insides of his thighs, throwing them over his shoulders. He leans down, parts Will's (gloriously full) cheeks, and *licks*, lapping a broad stripe with his tongue from the base of Will's spine up to to where his tiny balls hang, each sack heavy and full.

"*Ah!*" Will screams, jerking his thighs. Hannibal holds fast, keeping the boy's legs thrown over his shoulders in order to allow him complete access to his feast. A small dribble of precum gleams at the top of Will's cock and drips down the side of his erection, landing in the junction of his cock and hip. It smears into the pitiful amount of pubic hair growing around Will's erection.

Hannibal licks his lips and leans down again, running another stripe up Will's asshole, delighting in the keening noise that his boy releases from the touch. Hannibal licks again, and again, each time dipping his tongue further into Will's body. He presses forward so that his face is buried between Will's pert cheeks, mouthing at the sloppy hole and feeling as it slowly loosens under his ministrations. Each swipe of his tongue, each dip of it into the tiny, puckering hole, leaves Will's ass slightly looser, slightly wetter.

Hannibal is in love with the sounds Will is making. He licks deeper, drawing another low moan from the boy. The taste of Will (the musk of his skin, the spiciness of his arousal) blends with the saltiness of his sweat, and Hannibal groans as the flavor melts into his mouth and settles into his taste buds.

When he sucks on Will's hole, Will screams, digging the heels of his tiny feet into the top of Hannibal's back.

"Oh god," Will sobs, hole clenching on Hannibal's tongue and pulling him further in. The tight, wet clench of Will's hole around Hannibal is intoxicating, and Hannibal can easily imagine it's his cock inside of Will instead of his tongue, splitting his boy open one excruciating inch at a time until all Will can sense, all he can feel, is Hannibal inside of his body, thick and hard and throbbing.

Hannibal sucks again on the puckered hole, rewarded for his efforts when Will comes with a high, whining cry, spurting ejaculate across his chest until it hits the bottom of his chin. Hannibal continues licking throughout Will's orgasm, entranced at the way Will's hole clenches and releases around his tongue throughout the entirety of the boy's orgasm. When Will's body eventually relaxes, legs untightening from around Hannibal's neck and draping against his shoulders, Hannibal places Will back onto the bed, licking his lips, unable (unwilling) to let even a single drop of Will's taste go to waste.

Hannibal crawls up Will's body and licks the boy's cum from where it landed at the base of his pointed chin, holding the viscous liquid on his tongue for several moments before eventually swallowing. He continues cleaning Will, bathing the boy's body in long, broad strokes of his tongue until no cum is left on the boy's skin.

"How was that so good? Will slurs, completely boneless against the mattress. He runs a delicate hand through Hannibal's hair, petting it while Hannibal leans down to nip at the boy's sharp hip bones.

"Orgasms typically are," Hannibal responds, smirking at the drunk expression on Will's blissed-out face. He kisses Will, allowing the boy to taste himself on Hannibal's tongue. They stay like that for a long time, Hannibal licking into Will's mouth with sure strokes, sighing as Will returns the movement. Will is a fast learner; each kiss they share is better than the last as Will grows more confident in his body (in taking his pleasure). Hannibal cannot imagine how

incredible their intimacy will become as they learn each other's bodies as well as they know their own.

Will eventually moves his lax neck, staring down the length of the bed and eyeing Hannibal's thick erection. It tents the front of his silky maroon slacks in the most obscene way, and Will feels his mouth suddenly flood with saliva, though he's unsure why.

With a frown, Will says, "You didn't orgasm last time. Why? I want you to feel good, too."

Hannibal rests beside Will on his side, hand propped under his neck to support his head. He looks at Will with a warmth, a love, that nearly burns him from the inside out in its intensity. "I always feel good when I am around you, Mylimasis. You do not have to worry about me."

Will's frown (who is he kidding, it's a pout) deepens at Hannibal's answer. "But I want to do…something." Tears prick the corners of his eyes, and he feels embarrassed at the immature response, at the lack of knowledge he has about intimacy (about anything important to Hannibal). Hannibal must think he is so stupid for not knowing how to have sex. For not knowing how to reciprocate when Hannibal has already given Will so much pleasure. No wonder Hannibal won't take off all his clothing around Will. No wonder he doesn't want Will to touch him. No wonder—

"Will, I would be honored to have you do anything for me, even if it is just to look as I act. I apologize that you feel uncertain about our relationship." Hannibal sits up from where he was lying, running a hand through his already-messy hair. "You are…extremely important to me. I never want to push you further than you are willing to go."

"But I have my word," Will says, voice stuffed with too many emotions to name. "You promised to stop if I used it. I haven't used it yet."

"No," Hannibal replies, eyes dark. "You have not. What do you want to do to me?" Hannibal's voice deepens, turns dark like his eyes, and Will shivers at the sound.

"I…don't know. I liked when you put your mouth on me. On my dick. Can I do that to you?"

"Mylimasis, I would love nothing better." Without another word, Hannibal leans back on the bed and removes his suit jacket—which he has been wearing this entire time, even when his face was in Will's ass, his tongue in Will's *hole*. After the jacket is removed, he untucks his light blue dress shirt and begins undoing the buttons one by one. Each movement is slow, sensual, and Will finds himself growing hard again just at the sight of Hannibal removing his clothing.

By the time Hannibal has stripped down to his boxers, Will is practically vibrating with nerves, with excitement, so extremely eager to taste Hannibal as Hannibal has tasted him.

Hannibal looks directly into Will's eyes as he removes his boxers, gaze never faltering, even as his (enormous, god Will has never been so aroused in his life) erection springs from the material and slaps, heavy, against his stomach. Hannibal's cock is thick, uncut like his own,

far longer than Will's small cock and nearly as wide as his forearm. Will feels himself squirming, arousal building in his stomach and finding its way into his leaking erection.

"You're so *big*," Will says, breathless, and watches with pride as Hannibal's eyes dilate further, a small bead of precum dribbling from the head of his cock. Will leans his head down and sniffs at Hannibal's cock, breathing in the scent of Hannibal's musk straight from the source. With a small, delicate lick, he tastes the head of Hannibal's erection. The taste is not what he expected. It's salty, with a slight sharp sweetness that reminds Will of pineapple.

It's fucking delicious.

With a moan, Will licks again, wanting more of that heady taste on his tongue. Hannibal kneels on the mattress, allowing Will full reign over his exposed body. Will takes advantage of the privilege, worshiping Hannibal's cock the way Hannibal worships every inch of Will. He opens his mouth as wide as it will go and swallows the tip of Hannibal's weeping cock, surprised his jaw can open that far. Hannibal's answering moan is absolutely *wounded*, the sound of it mixing with the egregious slurping noises Will is making as he sucks and pulls on Hannibal's cock like he's sucking the remains of the most delectable dessert—and with the sweetness of Hannibal's semen in his mouth, it really does feel like Will is eating a dessert, one he has no intention of wasting.

Will reaches out with a trembling hand and grasps the base of Hannibal's cock, amazed at how silky the skin is beneath his fingertips. He rubs a finger from the base of Hannibal's cock —gently nudging his full, heavy balls—and glides it up to where his mouth is still firmly sealed around the head. Saliva leaks out from around his stretched lips, dripping down the side of Hannibal's cock and wetting Will's palm. Will begins to slide his hand up and down, entranced when he pulls back the foreskin and the perky, red head of Hannibal's cock is exposed to his mouth.

Hannibal moans again, voice slightly shaky, and for Will, Hannibal might as well be screaming his pleasure. The carefully controlled man, usually able to keep every movement of his body and voice in line, is now rocking into Will's mouth with every suck, precum practically gushing from his slit and smearing onto Will's tongue.

Will pulls back, watching with wonder as a trail of saliva and precum connects his lips to Hannibal's cock. "You taste so good," he says, surprised at how heavy his voice sounds, how deep it is, almost like he has been gargling salt water all day until Hannibal returned home from work.

Hannibal tilts his head back the slightest amount, baring his neck to Will, and lets out a long, slow breath. "You spoil, Mylimasis. Your mouth is like the softest velvet, and your hand is like the sweetest vise. Never have I experienced such pleasure as what you bring me now."

Will lets out his own moan, incredibly turned on by the praise (by Hannibal's precum on his tongue, by Hannibal's thick cock in his hand). He leans back down and begins sucking again, desperate to make Hannibal fall apart. He adds his other hand to the first, using both to stretch around Hannibal's incredible girth and stroke him up and down, coordinating his movements so that when he sucks the head it is at the same moment his hands reach the top of Hannibal's cock.

Hannibal raises his hand and places it into Will's curls, grabbing a few locks of hair as his hips continue shifting. Hannibal tightens his grip, and Will keens, shuddering at the pleasure-pain that rushes down his spine.

Hannibal notices his reaction (of course he does, even when in the middle of having his dick sucked) and pulls harder. Will arches his back, hips moving restless to find some sort of friction for his leaking cock. Hannibal laughs, rough and uneven.

"You like that? You like having your hair pulled while you suck on my cock?"

Will whines, sucks harder, thrusts faster. Tears pool in his eyes, spilling out from his lids and splashing onto Hannibal's dick below him. He can taste the salty tears mixed in with the sharp sweetness of Hannibal's precum.

"You are such a naughty boy, Will. So desperate for my spend. I bet I could hold you on my cock the entire day, barely allowing you to breathe, certainly not allowing you to move except to suckle at my erection, and you would thank me for the pleasure." The arousal in Hannibal's words is sharp enough to cut diamonds. It slices through Will's stomach and spills out of his cock, shooting a small load of semen onto the comforter as Will continues sucking throughout his orgasm.

Hannibal follows soon after, flooding Will's mouth with his salty-sweet semen. His grip becomes excruciating as he forces Will to stay on his cock, to drink up every drop of come that floods out of the slit. Will's orgasm remains a low buzz underneath his skin, prickling behind his eyes and under his scalp where Hannibal is practically ripping the hair from his head.

They both collapse back onto the (now wet) mattress, neither caring enough of the mess to move. Hannibal soothes Will's stinging scalp, running a gentle hand through his curls and pressing sweet kisses to his sweaty forehead. Will melts into the touch, enjoying these caresses as much as he enjoys the sex. After a while, Hannibal says, "We both should shower before dinner."

Will sighs and nods his head. They both get off the bed, eyeing one another's naked bodies as they pick up their dirty clothing and head into the bathroom. Hannibal places his suit into a separate hamper from Will's (Hannibal's) white undershirt and Hannibal's boxers. Will assumes it has to do with how fancy his suit is, perhaps because of the type of material it is made from or the price tag associated with it. As long as Will doesn't have to clean the clothes, he honestly doesn't care.

In the shower—which can fit both Hannibal and Will comfortably with plenty of room to spare—Hannibal massages shampoo and conditioner into Will's curls, washing the rest of his body with the goat's milk soap. Will now associates that smell—sweet milk and musky sandalwood—with Hannibal, and he practically purrs now that he is covered in the scent, too.

Will is too short to wash Hannibal's hair in return, so he settles for kneeling down and massaging soap into Hannibal's calves while the man washes his own hair. Will threads his fingers into Hannibal's thick leg hair, loving the prickly feel of it beneath his fingertips.

They dry one another off once outside of the shower, neither saying a word. They don't need to. Each action, each gentle pass of the towel or lingering caress of a hand says everything that their words would need to.

I care for you. I adore you.

I love you.

Will refuses to leave Hannibal's side, even to go fetch his own clothing from the guest room. Instead, he puts his old boxers back on (they smell fine, despite Hannibal's small discontented frown) and steals one of Hannibal's silky red sweaters, adoring the way it swallows his body whole, hanging down and nearly reaching his knees. Hannibal seems equally adoring, eyeing the sweater (eyeing Will) the entire time he is changing into fresh clothing.

They walk together downstairs to the kitchen, and Will watches with growing hunger as Hannibal pulls out the ingredients for lemongrass risotto and baked salmon.

"No pork today?" Will asks, still slightly unsure if he is allowed to bring up Hannibal's… unique diet or if that would only upset the man.

"Unfortunately, we are running short on pork at the moment." Hannibal gives him a wry grin, then says, "I plan to go hunting tomorrow night."

Will's heart thunders in his chest. He can picture it so clearly: Hannibal, wearing his plastic jacket, bringing a knife down and cleanly slicing open the throat of another person. Hannibal, covered in blood, removing the organs one by one from the person's body. Hannibal, leaning down to kiss Will as he hands Will the person's heart, the taste of blood now on both of their lips as they—

Will stops the daydream, ignoring the heat flaring in his chest (in his groin). To keep his mind occupied, he helps Hannibal make the risotto, carefully chopping the almonds, lemongrass, and bok choy, proud of himself for how evenly each of the cut ingredients turn out. Hannibal praises him for his work and kisses the top of his head.

Will feels like he's floating as he finishes preparing the risotto, head still spinning when he helps Hannibal carry both of their full plates into the kitchen once the fish is properly baked.

"It's good," Will says after stuffing the first bite of salmon into his mouth.

Hannibal merely watches, bemused, as Will shoves another bite into his mouth, then another, hardly taking the time to chew between each one.

"Remember what we talked about, Will," Hannibal chides, his tone warm but firm.

Will flushes and swallows his bite, noting that his plate is already half-empty and they've only been sitting for thirty seconds.

"Sorry," he murmurs, head ducking in shame. "Why don't we talk? That helped last time."

He has been trying—under Hannibal's patient direction—to not eat so fast. Hannibal has implemented several techniques to help Will focus on the setting rather than the food, including asking him questions while they are eating and refusing to let him answer unless he chews his food (slowly) and swallows it.

"A wonderful suggestion." Hannibal takes a bite of his fish—his first bite compared to Will's tenth—and closes his eyes in appreciation. "What do you know about your mother?"

Will nearly drops his fork, completely surprised at the question. He picks up a few pieces of rice and puts them in his mouth, chewing and thinking with careful concentration. Once he's swallowed, he replies, "Nothing, really." A memory stirs, fluttering its broken wings beneath the very edges of his consciousness, and Will tries to shove it back down, not wanting to view it now, not when he's so happy. "Why?"

Hannibal takes another bite, chews, then says, "You had a very…idiosyncratic upbringing. Each time I learn something from your past, it only makes me want to learn more. You have no memory of her then? Not even her name?"

Will shakes his head, suddenly nauseous. "No. No memories. No name. She left right after I was born, and my dad…" Here, the nausea rises up in his throat and threatens to spill out over his remaining salmon. "My dad didn't really talk about her."

Hannibal picks up on his discomfort, but rather than changing the subject as he normally does, he pokes harder, prods deeper. "But he did speak of her sometimes, then?"

Will shudders, the edges of his vision going black. He sets down his fork and pinches the bridge of his nose, a whine rising in him that he only just manages to keep down. "Sometimes."

"When was the last time he spoke of her, Will?"

Will's vision goes completely dark. In the distance, as if through a long tunnel, he hears Hannibal speaking, but he can't for the life of him make out a single word.

Then…

It's dark out. Will is back later than normal. Not that it matters. John hardly notices when he's there, never mind when he's gone. At least Will has something to bring back this time, a fish he caught with his homemade pole and a few fishing hooks he swiped from their neighbor's threadbare tackle box.

"Will," a voice slurs.

Oh god, John is in one of those *moods then. Sometimes, when his dad is long past drunk and has entered into a whole new realm of inebriation, he begins to get sentimental.*

Will thinks it is worse than his anger by far.

"Hi, dad," he mumbles, holding up the large trout. "Caught this for dinner. I'll cook."

“I don’t want no damn fish,” his dad mumbles, sprawled in his threadbare armchair in their tiny living room, entire body reeking of alcohol, of old piss and unwashed clothing.

Will breathes out through his nose and shrugs. “Sorry, dad. I won’t bring it again.”

“Damn straight,” John mutters, slumping back into the chair.

Will goes into their (even smaller) kitchen and grabs their only kitchen knife, dull and chipped from years of abuse. It slides unevenly into the trout’s belly, spilling blood and guts onto the laminate countertop. As Will is preparing the fish (with no idea what he’s doing, only some vague idea that removing the bones is important), John says, “Your ma liked fish. Craved it when she was big with you.”

Will jerks, nearly slicing off the tip of his thumb. “Oh?” he asks, not sure what to do with this information. He can count on one hand the amount of things he knows about his mother.

“Don’t like fish much,” John says again, and Will wants to roll his eyes.

He finishes preparing the meat to the best of his ability, content when there is still some meat left after all his poking and prodding to set in a pan over the stove. It only takes a minute or two to cook, and Will fetches a chipped plastic plate from one of the cabinets, placing the cooked trout on it before turning to head to his bedroom.

“Wait, boy. I ain’t done talking with you yet.”

Will pinches the bridge of his nose and turns to face his father.

“Sorry,” he mutters, not sorry in the slightest. “Didn’t think you’d wanna smell the fish.”

“It’s too late for that now. Whole trailer smells like a damn creek.”

Will bites his bottom lip and walks to the living room, waiting a few feet from his dad’s chair, shifting his weight from one foot to the other until he’s dismissed.

“Same lips as your ma, too.” John is frowning now, no doubt working towards some conclusion where Will ends up in the wrong.

“Okay,” Will says, unsure what else to say.

“Yours ain’t pretty, though. Not like hers.” John scratches at his patchy beard, and Will hates how similar the two of them look. Is this what will become of him in thirty years? Will he become washed-out and drunk, curls tangled and matted—not from a lack of running water or shampoo, but from a lack of care—teeth yellow and crooked, a can of half-drunk beer sitting idly in hands that are constantly covered with grease?

Will stands there, watching gears turn behind John’s eyes, and comes to a conclusion of his own.

“She didn’t love you,” Will breathes, voice quiet in the still room. He had always guessed such a thing, that his mother had left because she felt no love or loyalty towards the two of

them. But the look of anger (of self-hatred) in John's blue eyes at the comment is all the confirmation Will needs.

"What did you say, boy?" John asks, rising up from the chair and standing in front of Will, easily at least two feet taller than the young boy.

"Nothing," Will stammers, nearly dropping the plate as his fingers go lax with fear. "Sorry. I didn't mean to—it just slipped out."

John sneers down at him, lips tucked up into a tight grimace. "Always running that faggot mouth of yours. Staring at me like you know what I'm thinkin'. Freak brain of yours never did know when to quit."

With a solid backhand, Will is slapped cleanly across his left cheek, pain stinging behind his eyes as an awful burning sensation spreads throughout his face. He drops the plate of fish (four hours, it took four hours to catch that trout, gut it, and cook it, and now it is on the floor mixed in with the years of grime and dirt from the unwashed carpet). The fact that his dinner is now gone hurts worse than the pain in his face.

John is not so easily appeased. With a quick, practiced movement, he removes the belt keeping his trousers on, sliding it into the palm of his right hand with an easy movement. Will is embarrassed by the squeak that leaves his mouth, knees knocking together as his back tingles and throbs from the agony it knows is coming.

"Please," Will whimpers, willing to get on his knees and beg, willing to do almost anything if it means he won't get beat with the belt. He is too hungry tonight, has gone too long without a meal. His body won't last a thorough beating, not the one his father looks so eager to dole out.

"No use whinin' now, boy."

Will makes the mistake of biting his bottom lip. The movement draws his father's eyes, reminds him (Will supposes, he is too scared for his empathy to work clearly) of his mother's mouth. Perhaps she had a similar habit of biting her lip when anxious.

With an almighty roar, John slams his fist down across Will's head, nearly knocking the boy unconscious. As his mind swims, unable to distinguish between up and down, John's belt comes lashing against his back, biting through the thin fabric of his t-shirt and licking a stripe of pain up his spine.

Will cries, embarrassed at the noise but unable to do anything else. John lashes him again, this time across his lower back, and the pain is so intense that Will blacks out for a moment, a sweet reprieve from the agony. He wishes he would pass out again, wishes his body wasn't so used to taking pain, wishes he were dead rather than lying in a pile of filth and slowly-cooling fish, being beaten to a bloody pulp by his own father.

He gets his wish. Well, he gets one of them. After a few more blows, John accidentally whips Will's head rather than his back, and the lash is enough to send him into the blessed realm of unconsciousness.

When Will wakes, it's to an aching, throbbing body and a biting coolness that doesn't match the burning of his skin. Blearily, tenderly, Will peeks open his eyes, surprised to find that's he on the ground outside rather than in a heap in the living room of the trailer.

He forces himself to sit up, retching bile at the sudden movement. There's nothing in his stomach to throw up; all that comes out is a clear, burning liquid that makes his eyes water. Or maybe that's the pain.

Will looks around, just to be sure.

He's outside. The trailer is gone from the small hookup John had found a month or two prior.

Will is all alone. His father has finally left him, a terrifying thing Will didn't even know could occur. He never liked living with his father, but it provided a roof over his head, running water for his body, the occasional meal or two.

Now, though, he was alone. Completely, utterly alone.

And there was nothing he could do but lay back down on the hard dirt, next to the puddle of bile, and cry.

"Will!"

Will blinks open bleary eyes, surprised to find Hannibal kneeling in front of him, gently grasping his arms in two warm, broad palms. "My darling, are you alright?"

Will assesses his body (the lack of pain, the pleasant warmth of food in his stomach, the silky soft material of Hannibal's sweater wrapped around his chest) and promptly bursts into tears.

With a soft coo, Hannibal lifts him from the dining room chair and carries him into the office where Hannibal sits in the leather armchair and pulls Will into his lap, murmuring words in another language that sound like a lullaby.

"I'm sorry," Will sobs, wiping his runny nose with the back of his hand, then pausing because he can't get snot on his (Hannibal's) sweater, it probably cost more than the spiky silver ring his father wore when he pummeled Will's face—John was always enchanted with the way it cut and left bruises that would last for weeks rather than days. Will looks down at his snot-covered hand and cries harder, feeling useless and torn and helpless.

"Here," Hannibal murmurs, his accented voice a soothing balm on Will's troubled mind. He reaches into his pocket and pulls out a napkin, gently handing it to Will to blow his nose and clean his hand.

"Thank you," Will mumbles, throwing the used napkin into the fire and watching it burn into a tiny pile of ash. He leans back down and tucks his head into the crook of Hannibal's scent, breathing in the man's scent and forcing himself not to lick the delicate skin that pulses over Hannibal's artery.

"Think nothing of it, Mylimasis."

The concern in Hannibal's voice, the sincerity (the love) has tears welling in Will's eyes once more. He pushes them back down, taking deep, soothing breaths, eventually settling down into a hazy, half-conscious state.

When the room has turned dark from the set sun and the fire is the only source of light, flickering orange and yellow behind Will's closed eyelids, Hannibal says, "I am so sorry that I caused you to experience such pain. You must know it was never my intention, my darling boy. I only wanted you to focus on our questions so you would eat slower, and instead I sent you spiraling into a nightmare. I give you full permission to bestow whatever punishment you see as fit upon me."

Will (unwillingly) pulls his face away from Hannibal's neck, peering up into his dazzling maroon eyes, irises turned the color of red wine from the flickering light of the fire. "Punishment?"

"I believe that would be in order, yes," Hannibal responds, voice giving away nothing.

Will thinks of all that Hannibal has done for him just that day; allowing Will to move into his room and sleep in his bed, giving Will endless amounts of pleasure, washing Will in the shower, allowing Will to steal his clothing, cooking Will a delicious meal, comforting Will when his mind shattered and spiraled out of control. Will shifts on Hannibal's lap, finding comfort with the feeling of thick muscle beneath his own thin legs.

"Fine," Will says, allowing his breath to fan out over Hannibal's lips, watching with wonder as the man's eyes dilate and his mouth trembles the slightest amount. "Your punishment is to take me to bed and hold me close the entire night. No getting up." No leaving Will alone, not even for a second.

"I think you misunderstand the concept of punishment," Hannibal says, and Will scrunches up his nose and rolls his eyes.

"I think you misunderstand who is in charge," Will says, his voice a perfect mimic of Hannibal's accent and cadence.

Hannibal's eyes darken further, drinking up Will's face, his voice (his soul) and still wanting more. Will shivers at Hannibal's beast, watching it sit, claws flexing, behind the zipper of his person suit.

"Very well, Mylimasis. I shall take you to bed and not let you go until morning."

"That's all I'm asking," Will says, suddenly exhausted.

"And that is what you shall get," Hannibal replies, tucking a curl behind Will's ear. Will leans into the gentle touch and slowly, carefully, falls in love.

Dinner Party

Chapter Summary

Hannibal and Will hold their first dinner party together.

Though holding Will in his arms is not a punishment, holding Will while the bedding is dirty and their dishes still sit on the dining room table, unwashed, is. Hannibal forces himself to relax, wrapping his arms tighter around Will's waist and pulling his small body backward until every inch of their skin is touching. Hannibal leans down and places his nose amongst Will's wild curls, calming at the sweet, familiar scent.

Will remains fast asleep. He allows the movement without stirring a muscle, completely relaxed inside of Hannibal's embrace. It makes Hannibal want to preen. Each time Will shows his trust in Hannibal (even subconsciously) it adds another blooming petal to the flowering bouquet of his love for Will.

It speaks to how fragile Will is—how tormented his mind became after his nightmare—that he left a plate of unfinished food on Hannibal's table. Since Hannibal had found the boy, Will has not wasted a single crumb, a solitary drop of food or drink. Anything Hannibal made for Will was promptly consumed as if it might be taken away by some unseen force if it wasn't immediately put into Will's stomach.

Hannibal had no idea that asking after Will's mother would garner such a visceral reaction. Though he is sad he caused Will pain—that Will's pain made him forgo his dinner and Hannibal's ability to clean up after said dinner—Hannibal cannot feel any regret for the way Will's pain made him clingy, needy. The way Will curled into his lap and sucked at Hannibal's scent as if it were the only drug on earth that could satiate him, could provide him with comfort.

Well, Hannibal might just have to bring up Will's mother again—this time after dinner is finished.

Hannibal sighs and forces his body to relax, sliding his thick thigh in-between Will's own slender legs, luxuriating in the warmth that surrounds his limbs as Will's heat slowly transfers to him. It only takes a moment for him to fall asleep, and when he awakes early the next morning, neither of them have moved from their close position save for Will's pert, plush ass being pressed even further backwards than it was the previous night, snugly fitting against Hannibal's groin—and his morning erection.

Hannibal allows himself a single, solitary thrust into that magnificently wonderful heat before forcing himself to pull away. He has much to do, and though he wishes he could spend

the entire day in bed, grinding against Will until both of them peak and then doing it all over again, he cannot.

By the time Hannibal has cleaned the kitchen, showered, and prepared breakfast, Will finally rises from his slumber. Hannibal notices the small, purple bags under Will's eyes and frowns, fetching a cooling facial moisturizer to help the boy's skin recover from his panic attack the night before.

"Good morning," Hannibal greets, handing the small jar of lotion to Will.

"Morning," Will mumbles, rubbing a hand over one of his tired, red-rimmed eyes. "What's this?"

"It's for your skin. It will help relieve any residual swelling underneath your eyes."

Will scrunches his nose and shuffles away from the bed, toward the en suite bathroom. "Swelling? Did I have an allergic reaction or something?" He pulls open the bathroom door and slides in front of the mirror, looking at his reflection with a critical gaze.

"Crying can sometimes cause fluid to build-up beneath the eyes. I simply want you to be comfortable, Mylimasis."

"And pretty," Will grunts, opening the lotion and smearing an ungodly amount over his face. Hannibal decides not to tell him that that single jar of lotion cost nearly one-thousand dollars and was imported from Italy.

Hannibal likes that Will is treating his body with care, treating *himself* with care. There would be no use in guilting the boy now about the cost. It would be easy to replace, and Hannibal—as a member of one of the wealthiest households in the world—could afford a million more of the jars if it would encourage Will to see himself as something precious (like Hannibal sees him).

"You are always pretty, Will. From the moment I saw you, I believed you to be the most beautiful thing on this earth." Will's scent thickens with a combination of embarrassment and pleasure, and Hannibal decides to have mercy on the boy. After all, Will did have a very trying evening. "I made French toast, eggs, and bacon," Hannibal says once Will has (mostly) rubbed the lotion into his skin.

Will groans and immediately sets the glass jar onto the granite countertop, spinning to face Hannibal. "Why didn't you say that first? That's way more important than lotion!"

Hannibal smiles, enchanted, and motions for Will to follow him downstairs. "Then let's not waste a moment more."

Will practically sprints down the stairs, suddenly wide awake, and Hannibal follows behind at a much more leisurely pace, enjoying the view from behind Will. Will is still only wearing Hannibal's red cashmere sweater and his boxers, and Hannibal can't say he's upset by the boy's sense of fashion. The crimson fabric highlights the pale, milky tone of Will's skin, and

because the sweater only reaches just below his ass, the rest of Will's lithe legs are on display for Hannibal's hungry gaze to consume.

Hannibal shoos Will into the dining room while he finishes loading food onto their plates, placing a dollop of freshly whipped cream on each stack of French toast before bringing both plates to the table. Hannibal has a steaming cup of black coffee to accompany his breakfast while Will has been given a glass of cranberry juice—partially because the juice has many beneficial properties that will help Will's health, but mostly because Hannibal is enamored with the way it stains his boy's lips a deliciously deep red, almost as if Will had just drank a cup of blood (and the idea of Will drinking blood, licking it from one of Hannibal's kills while the two of them fuck over the dead body, is enough to have Hannibal's morning erection fully back in place).

Will digs into his plate of food with the fervor of an alley dog, smearing cream and syrup onto his lips before licking them off in the most obscene manner. Hannibal doesn't comment on the pace of Will's eating, sure that his boy is hungry after forgoing the rest of his dinner the night before.

Once Will's plate is nearly empty, Will leans back in his chair and takes a long sip of his juice, practically draining the glass in one go.

"It's amazing," Will says, pointing at the mostly-finished food with a careless wave of his fork. "As usual."

"And yet I will never grow tired of you complimenting my cooking," Hannibal responds, lifting a slice of (unfortunately actual pork) bacon and biting into the crisp meat. He chews, upset at the lack of *human* in the flavor, and swallows with a lackluster hum.

Will rolls his eyes and gives him a cheeky grin. "I guess you are glad there's someone here to stoke your ego every day, then. How did you survive before with only your dinner parties and trips to the opera?"

"Barely," Hannibal says, "and with far less pleasure." Hannibal finishes his food before saying, "Thanksgiving is coming up soon. Usually I host a meal around this time to celebrate the holiday. If you are amenable to the idea, I would love to continue hosting again this year."

Will frowns and pushes his chair away from the table, tapping a nervous rhythm on the tops of his (uncovered) thighs. "Who would you invite?"

"Neither of the Vergers, if that is a concern. Usually I invite Mrs. and Mr. Komeda. Bedelia would get an invitation this year, as well as her assistant. A few doctors and nurses from the hospital. And of course a handful of socialites who have come to expect an invitation, though I take no pleasure in their presence."

Will sighs, shifting in his seat. "Yeah, I guess that's okay."

"You spoil me, darling." Hannibal stands up from his chair, prompting an unconscious mimicry in Will. They both go into the kitchen, wash their dishes, and then head into

Hannibal's office. Once there, Hannibal asks, "Though I adore seeing you in my clothing, is there a reason you have worn my clothes instead of your own yesterday and today?"

Will flushes a deep red, trailing his fingertips over the lid of the piano. "Yes."

Hannibal waits, but Will provides no further answer. His scent burns with spiced pepper, embarrassment clogging the room and flooding Hannibal's nostrils.

Finally, Will adds (in a voice far smaller than normal), "When I tried to put on one of my flannel shirts yesterday, it wouldn't button up." Will hangs his head, completely ashamed of something that should be a cause for celebration.

Hannibal wastes no time in correcting Will's (tragically low) self-esteem. "Mylimasis, that's wonderful. I am so happy you are growing. Your body looks healthier by the day. Perhaps I can take your measurements again and have them sent to a few different shops. I promise you will have an entirely new wardrobe to wear by the end of the week. Until then, I am more than happy to see you in my clothing. Or, better yet, nothing at all." Hannibal allows his voice to turn sultry, seductive.

The shame and embarrassment in Will's scent turns to a sharp, heady arousal, exactly as Hannibal planned. With an impish shrug—which causes Will's (Hannibal's) sweater to slide down his shoulder and reveal a sleek, pale collarbone which Hannibal wants to bite—Will relaxes from his fidgeting, sitting on the piano bench with a sigh of relief.

"What are we going to do with my old clothes? There are a couple of things that still fit, but most of it doesn't."

Hannibal pauses, considering. "I usually donate any of my clothing that I no longer have use for. There are many different shelters in Baltimore; why don't you help me pick one where we can donate your clothing?"

Will's beautiful blue eyes flood with tears, his gaze so tender it hurts for Hannibal to look at.

Hannibal looks harder.

"That's…actually awesome." Will sniffs and runs a hand across his rapidly-reddening nose. "You're awesome."

Hannibal tilts his head. "I don't think anyone has ever referred to me as *awesome* before."

"Well they should. You're probably the most awesome person I've ever met. Just try not to get too big a head about it."

"Of course not," Hannibal says, voice solemn, and Will giggles. The sound is high, melodic, and Hannibal wants to eat the noise and keep it forever inside his stomach so that anywhere he goes, at any point in time, he can reach inside and hear the noise again, forever a part of him.

"Can I…" Will pauses, tugs at his earlobe. "Could I keep the blue coat? It might not fit for very long, but even if it's just another week, I want to have it."

“Sweet Will, of course you can keep your coat. You can keep anything in that closet, whether it fits or not. Those things are yours to do with as you please. I’ll have the coat refitted to your new measurements, and when you outgrow that one we’ll buy you the same one again as a replacement.”

Will sags against the piano bench, shame and pleasure and happiness swirling around in his scent like snowflakes in a glass globe. Hannibal smiles at him, adoring, and wishes this moment might last forever.

Instead, they spend another hour or two inside Hannibal’s office. Will reads *Anna Karenina* in a lilting voice while Hannibal reclines in front of the fireplace, feeling more at peace than…he ever has before in his life. The thought is sudden but not surprising. What more could he possibly need than what he has right here before him? A full stomach, a comfortable home filled with things he’s collected on his extensive travels, the thrill of a future hunt, and his other half at his side.

“I want to read this in Russian one day,” Will says once his voice has gone hoarse from speaking out loud for so long. “The original translation.”

“*Otlichnaya ideya lyubimyy*,” Hannibal purrs, watching with hunger as Will’s pupils dilate and his petal-soft lips part into a soft moue.

“What should we do next?” Will asks, setting down the thick book and standing with a grunt, stretching his arms and neck. Hannibal forces his eyes not to blink, to not miss a single second as the red sweater rides up Will’s long, pale thighs until everything from his waist down—except what those cursed boxers cover—is exposed to Hannibal’s gaze.

Will notices Hannibal watching him and flushes, immediately lowering his arms and tugging on the end of the sweater with quick, nervous movements.

“Why don’t we take your new measurements?” Hannibal suggests, standing from the armchair and stretching his own arms and back, amused when Will watches his movements with just as much hunger—if not more—than Hannibal had just been watching him. “The measuring tape is in my bedroom. Afterward, we can eat some lunch.”

Will bobbles his head, practically vibrating out of his skin as he follows Hannibal upstairs to their bedroom. Once inside, Hannibal places a hand on Will’s lower back and gently turns him to the bed, guiding him to sit on the edge of the mattress. Hannibal fetches the thin, fabric measuring tape from a cabinet in the bathroom and quickly returns, eager to see the fruits of his efforts in healing Will in stark, black-and-white numbers.

“You’ll have to remove the sweater,” Hannibal says.

Will, whose cheeks are still flushed from Hannibal’s perusal downstairs, turns an even darker shade of red. He quickly pulls the sweater over his head and sets it on the comforter to his right, fingers lingering to caress the soft fabric a final time before eventually retreating.

“Perfect,” Hannibal murmurs, unwrapping the measuring tape and pulling it in a small loop around Will’s left wrist. He does the same to Will’s forearm, then bicep, and finally his

armpit, wrapping the band in a neat circle between Will's scapula and rotator cuff.

With a slow, steady hand, Hannibal moves the tape to Will's neck, gently winding it around the delicate skin. He breathes in the sharp spike of Will's arousal, noting with interest that Will seems to like having his neck covered; Hannibal thinks of how well a collar would look draped over Will's pale, slender neck, marking him as *Hannibal's*.

After Will's neck has been measured, Hannibal moves to the boy's chest, encasing the boy's upper chest (and nipples) with the thin tape. Will squirms beneath the touch, and Hannibal wonders if his nipples are still sensitive after being sucked two days ago. If not, Hannibal might have to introduce the bright red nubs to his lips once more before the day is over.

Hannibal caresses a hand along Will's stomach, enjoying the soft press of warm skin beneath his palm, enjoying even more the thin layer of fat that is starting to develop above Will's muscles. "You grow healthier each day, Will. When I found you, your face was gaunt, your ribs stuck out from beneath your skin, and each of your joints protruded around the bone. Now, you practically glow. I couldn't be more proud of your recovery. I am the most privileged man on the planet to witness your beauty as it increases by tenfold each day."

Will rolls his eyes, but Hannibal can tell he is affected by the words. Each compliment given is like a stroke along the boy's sensitive skin, and by the time Hannibal is finished speaking, Will's entire body is trembling. The front of his boxers betrays the outline of his tiny erection.

Hannibal ignores Will's cock, draping the tape around the boy's slim waist and noting with pride that Will has gained over three inches around his middle since Hannibal measured him the first time all those weeks ago.

By the time Hannibal has finished measuring the boy's ankles, Will is drenched in sweat and shaking on top of the bed. Each caress of Hannibal's fingertips over an inch of exposed skin sends Will into a fit, whether the touch is intentional or not.

"My poor boy," Hannibal murmurs, setting the tape to the side and slowly stroking his palms up and down Will's sweat-slick thighs. "You must be aching, beloved. Would you like me to help with that?"

"Please!" Will cries, bucking his hips into empty air.

With a grin that could cut glass, Hannibal slides Will's boxers off of his thighs and sets them on top of the discarded red sweater. In an instant, he leans down and swallows Will's small cock, easily fitting his mouth over the three inches of throbbing flesh.

Will moans, reaching his hands down to catch Hannibal's hair. Hannibal relishes the pain, rolling his own erection to relieve some of the pressure in his slacks. He sucks harder, hollowing his cheeks and swallowing the copious amount of precum that Will produces. The flavor of Will's semen is less bitter today, more sweet, perhaps from their breakfast that morning. Hannibal laves his tongue through the slit of Will's cock, savoring the succulent flavor.

"*Hannibal*," Will whines, thrusting his cock in and out of Hannibal's mouth. The small erection barely makes it past Hannibal's molars, nowhere near reaching his throat. Hannibal wonders if it will grow more through Will's puberty or if the years of malnutrition have stunted the boy's growth too severely for it to lengthen anymore. Hannibal does not mind either way, content to have Will in his mouth in whatever fashion, large or small.

With an obscene slurp, Hannibal releases Will's erection, noting with pride how wet and soaked in spit the throbbing flesh has become. It's covered in a mixture of saliva and precum, and Hannibal can't help but give the swollen head one final lick before leaning down and sucking Will's balls into his mouth.

Will keens and throws his head back, exposing the long line of his flushed throat. His grip tightens, bordering on agony, and Hannibal only grows harder at the burning sensation that prickles along his scalp.

Hannibal swirls his tongue around each of Will's balls. One is slightly larger than the other, heavier in his mouth, and Hannibal gives the tender area an extra hard suck as if to draw the semen out directly through the skin. Will lets out a garbled moan and comes, shooting his seed along his bared chest and throat.

Hannibal gets up from where he's been kneeling and stands over Will's prone form. With a hungry gaze, he leans down and licks the cum from Will's skin, savoring the bitter-sweet flavor as it slides down his throat and into his ravenous stomach.

Will's eyes sparkle with unshed tears, and there's fresh blood on his bottom lip from where his teeth broke the skin during his orgasm. Hannibal licks up the blood, enjoying it almost as much, if not more than, Will's semen.

"May I try something, dearest?" Hannibal asks, popping open the button on his slacks and unzipping the fly.

Will nods his head, a single, solitary tear sliding down his beet-red cheek. "Yes. I am so far from saying red right now it's not even funny."

"Your enthusiasm always makes me so happy, darling. My entire being aches for you."

Will gives him a slow, sensual smile and lies back down on the bed, apparently too worn out to continue sitting up. Hannibal does not mind; for what he has planned, there is little participation needed from Will.

He continues to remove his clothing, folding his slacks and shirt into a neat pile and setting them on top of his nightstand. He takes off his socks and boxers, folding those too, before reaching into the nightstand and pulling out the glass bottle of lubricant.

"Turn over for me, Will," Hannibal says, patting Will's hipbone. Will nods and flips over immediately, not hesitating for even a moment. The amount of trust Will gives Hannibal (by showing him his back, by allowing Hannibal to take charge even when Will has no experience) makes something warm settle in Hannibal's chest. He strokes a hand along Will's

back, stopping at the base of his spine where two twin divots sit. He slaps Will's pert ass and watches with delight as it jiggles.

Will moans, arching his back and presenting himself more for Hannibal. Hannibal leans down and scrapes his teeth over one of Will's cheeks, biting at the taut skin and leaving an impression of his teeth in the delicate flesh. Hopefully the mark will bruise, and each time Will sits down over the coming days, he will think of this moment, of Hannibal kneeling over him and dictating what pleasure he can and cannot have.

With a flick of his wrist, Hannibal opens the bottle of lubricant and pours some into his open palm. He spreads it first along his aching erection, then applies the rest in-between Will's cheeks, teasing Will's hole for only a moment and delighting when Will whines at the brief intrusion.

"What are you going to do?" Will asks, breathless.

Hannibal puts the lubricant back into the nightstand and positions himself over Will's splayed body, using his hands to push Will's cheeks together to form a tight, wet vise for him to glide into.

"I'm going to use your delicious ass to pleasure myself until I come," Hannibal says.

He waits briefly for a response (for Will to say the single word that would bring Hannibal to a halt) but the only thing Will manages to let out is a garbled, "Oh my god."

Hannibal takes this as a sign of sincerely enthusiastic consent.

With a single slow thrust, Hannibal buries his cock in between Will's plump cheeks, squeezing even harder to provide more friction against his aching flesh. Will's skin is sinfully silky against his foreskin, dragging against his erection with a delicious, wet glide. Hannibal groans and thrusts again, instantly addicted to the feel of Will, to the feel of hot flesh molding around his cock as if it were *made* for this, as if its only purpose in life was to bring Hannibal indescribable amounts of pleasure.

Hannibal can feel Will shiver beneath him. It ripples along Will's exposed back and down to where Hannibal is grinding against his ass. Will squeezes Hannibal's cock on instinct, and Hannibal growls, shoving forward with vicious precision, pounding his cock between Will's warm, welcoming flesh. Each time the head of his cock pokes out from between Will's cheeks, it spreads a small puddle of precum into the divot of Will's lower back, and Hannibal watches with pride as the puddle grows bigger and bigger with each thrust of his body forward.

Will is mewling beneath him, grinding his own erection into the comforter below. Each time Will's hips swivel down and then back up, it creates a glide alone Hannibal's throbbing cock, and he increases the power behind his thrusts, a familiar, burning pleasure starting to crawl along his spine.

"I'm close, Mylimasis," Hannibal growls. The room is filled with the sounds of their heavy breathing, with the wet sounds of Hannibal's cock sliding in and out of the tight space he's

created against Will's ass. "Your body brings me such pleasure. Every touch, every sound is like nothing I've heard before." As if to prove his point, Hannibal gives a particularly hard thrust and listens with wonder as Will practically screams, arching his back and presenting his ass higher, begging Hannibal to take him harder, faster.

"Please," Will whimpers. A spasm runs along Will's spine, trapping Hannibal's erection in Will's tight, vise-like heat as the boy clenches around him.

"It's like you were made for me, Will," Hannibal says, and those words are what send Will tumbling over the edge, crying out as his entire body trembles, his hips eventually stopping their incessant grind against the mattress as he becomes overstimulated.

With Will lax beneath him, Hannibal sets his own pace, thrusting his cock even harder against Will's skin. The head of his erection catches against Will's puckered hole, and he groans, imagining plunging into that tight hole with no preparation, no stretching, just his cock forcing its way inside of Will's body until all of him is inside the smaller boy.

"Will…" Hannibal bites out, coming at the thought. He spills over Will's back, shooting his spend until it nearly reaches Will's curly hair. He leans down and forces himself to breathe, almost overcome by the power of his orgasm. With a trembling hand, he slides his torso along Will's spine, his slicked skin easily gliding along Will's own sweat-soaked back. He licks at his spend, not letting a single drop go to waste, before grabbing Will's thin hips and flipping the boy back over.

Will's blue eyes are completely hazy, black lashes fluttering with each shuddering breath he takes. His face is flushed, the bite mark on his lower lip still not closed up and leaking tiny droplets of maroon blood. Hannibal admires the view for a moment before leaning down and slurping Will's soft cock into his mouth, cleaning the pitiful amount of semen Will released during his second orgasm. Will whines at the over-stimulation, pushing Hannibal's head away with a trembling hand, hardly any power behind his palm.

Hannibal releases Will's tiny cock, licking his lips as the taste of both of their seed mixes together on his tongue, far more delicious than any meal he has ever been able to create in the kitchen.

"Why don't you get some rest, darling," Hannibal says. "I need to wash our bedding and run a few errands. Can I move you to the guest bedroom for now?"

Will nods his head. "Sure," he slurs, voice drunk (as it always is after Hannibal brings him to completion).

Hannibal smiles and lifts Will's body into his arms, carrying him out of their bedroom and into the guest room. He gently deposits Will onto the bed before going to the closet and fetching a clean pair of boxers and one of Will's larger shirts for the boy to wear. He doesn't grab any pants; Will has walked around without them the past two days, and Hannibal is more than happy to continue the pattern.

"Here. I'll go grab you a glass of water as well. Are you hungry? Do you need anything else?"

Will smiles at him, adoration shining from every pore, and shakes his head. “No. You’re so good to me.”

“You deserve everything, Will. It is merely my privilege to provide.”

Hannibal leans down and kisses the boy’s forehead, breathing in the scent of his sweat, his pleasure, the undertones of happiness and contentment that blossom and grow with each second Hannibal stays in Will’s presence.

He forces himself to leave. Hannibal first goes into the bathroom to run a wet washcloth over his sweat-slicked skin before returning to their bedroom. He pulls on his clothing and straightens each item, making sure there are no wrinkles in his button-down or slacks. After he’s dressed, he goes downstairs and grabs a cooled bottle of water from the fridge before bringing it to Will, making sure the boy drinks the entire thing before he lays down to sleep.

Hannibal is going hunting tonight to restock his freezer. After that, he will need to have several more swine butchered if he is to procure the meat rquired for his dinner party. Though there is not nearly enough time as he would like to plan out a meal of this magnitude, Hannibal will not let Will’s acquiescence go to waste. He will throw his grandest dinner party yet, and Will will sit at his side, the perfect companion to accompany him.

With that decided, Hannibal reaches for his rolodex and begins planning the dinner menu, noting with interest that he has not asked for a single new business card since Will came into his life. Perhaps it is because he is spending the majority of time at home rather than in public. Perhaps it is because people treat him with more respect when he has someone with him rather than being alone. Or perhaps it’s because he simply doesn’t care as much about small slights when he has Will to focus on, Will to capture every second of his attention. Whatever the case, Hannibal’s rolodex will be much lighter after his dinner party, and he will have to think of new ways to fill it back up so that he is never short on swine.

Hannibal runs to the grocery store to stock up on ingredients that won’t need to be purchased fresh; those items will be bought over the coming days before the dinner party. He also hand-writes each party invitation, soliciting Will’s help in closing the envelopes. Though Will’s handwriting has improved exponentially the past month and a half, it is still barely legible, and Hannibal does not want any of his invitations getting lost in the mail.

His hunt goes smoothly that night, and he easily finds and kills the rude medical examiner who had insinuated that Hannibal might be lying to try and trick his insurance company (a ridiculous proposition; if Hannibal so desired, he could purchase the entire insurance company and then dissolve it within the blink of an eye. As it were, the only thing he desired was some extra meat for his freezer).

The next day is spent with Bedelia. Hannibal delivers her invitation with a downward tilt of his eyes and a quiet, “It would mean a great deal to both Will and I if you would attend.”

Bedelia eyes him, trying to see past his carefully crafted mask, and eventually accepts the invitation with a delicate flick of her wrist. “Of course. I would be delighted.”

Hannibal delivers the invitation to Bedelia's assistant as well, and this one is met with much more enthusiasm.

The young woman (and though Hannibal is likely the same age as her, it is her immaturity which makes her appear young, not the number of years she has been alive) replies with an, "Oh my gosh! I would love that. I've heard so much about your dinner parties. I never thought I'd get to go to one myself. This is amazing. Will Dr. Du Maurier be there? Of course she will, you wouldn't invite me and not her. Anyway, thank you!"

Hannibal returns home to find Will banging around in the kitchen, once more only wearing a pair of boxers and one of Hannibal's shirts, this one a cerulean button-down that hangs just above Will's knees and brings out the blue veins running beneath his pale, nearly-translucent skin. There's a small dusting of flour covering Will's curls, frost over waves of walnut, and another smattering of flour along Will's cheeks and nose.

"Darling," Hannibal says, voice husky. "Are you cooking for me?"

Will looks up from where his head had been buried inside of a bowl of…well, Hannibal isn't really sure what the concoction is, but it smells sweet, likely a mixture of flour, sugar and… honey?

"You're home," Will breathes, eyes wide. He darts his gaze over to the clock and blanches, clearly having lost track of time. Will sighs, wipes a hand over his sweaty forehead, then grimaces when he merely spreads the sweat and flour around instead of clearing either off. "I…didn't realize how late it was."

"I see that," Hannibal says, struggling to hold back the grin that wants to break out over his face at such a scene. He's never taken such pleasure in beholding a mess (in his *kitchen* of all places) ever before. But then, Will is always introducing him to new pleasures. "What are you making?"

Will's face falls. He bites on his bottom lip, nearly opening up the barely-healed scabs. "It's supposed to be *tortas medutis*. I found one of the Lithuanian cookbooks in your office, and I thought I was translating it alright with that dictionary you left me, but…" Will sighs again and slumps his shoulders. "It's a mess. I'm a mess. Your kitchen is a mess."

Hannibal tilts his head, utterly fascinated both by what Will is (attempting) to make and his reaction to being caught.

"It's just," Will continues, "you are always cooking for me. Doing everything for me. And I wanted to do something nice for you in return." Tears flood Will's eyes, turning the blue irises into glittering sapphire. Hannibal wants to pluck the boy's eyes from his face and wear them around his neck, an infinitely priceless ornament that he would never have to be parted with.

Hannibal clears his throat and attempts to keep his emotions in check. He needs to be strong, calm, immovable. For Will. "I am honored you are cooking for me, Will. It has been…many, many years since someone thought to do such a thing for me." Hannibal gives a delicate sniff, forcing the love that clogs his throat back down into the pit of his bottomless stomach.

“If it is alright, I would love to join you. It seems you have most of the right ingredients out. This cake is particularly tricky as it requires layering the dough after it is cooked. Would you like some assistance?”

Will beams, all shame forgotten, and the sun seems to shine a little brighter through the window as if recognizing there is something even more dazzling trying to take its place. “That’s great! The cookbook is over there.” Will points to the countertop where, hidden under several bags of different types of flour, there is indeed a cookbook, one Hannibal hasn’t set eyes on since he was a child. Of course Will would find one of the only books in his library from his home; the boy had the instincts of a bloodhound when it came to sniffing out which items in Hannibal’s house were of importance (and Hannibal refuses to use the word sentimental) and which were not.

With a matching smile, Hannibal grabs his apron from where it hangs on the wall and joins Will by the mixing bowl. Together, they manage to form the dough in a short amount of time and with a relatively small amount of flour spreading from Will to Hannibal. Hannibal can’t say he minds, relishing each tap of Will’s hip against his own, each brush of Will’s arm against his shoulder.

“There,” Will says, voice practically crowing. “I think we did it.”

Hannibal peers down at the dough, surprised at how decent the results turned out considering how the dough started. He smiles at Will, lowering his lashes so that he’s almost closing his eyes. “You amaze me each and every day, Mylimasis.”

Will flushes, squirms. Then he reaches up on his tiptoes and places a short, shy kiss on Hannibal’s lips before immediately lowering himself back down and staring at the countertop. As if he is embarrassed. As if he is worried his advance will be rejected.

Hannibal immediately decides to set that worry to rest.

With a quick loop of his arm, Hannibal pulls Will onto the countertop, delighting in the boy’s high-pitched squeal. He places Will’s pert bottom on the center of the counter, far away from their finished dough, and leans down to properly kiss his boy.

Will moans, threading messy fingers into his dark hair. Will eagerly licks into his waiting mouth, tasting of honey and sugar and every sweet thing. Hannibal moans in return, thrusting his tongue into Will’s waiting mouth, knowing how much his boy likes to suck on it when they are kissing (and of course his perfect companion would have an oral fixation that was never truly satiated). Will rocks his hips back and forth along the countertop, rubbing himself against Hannibal’s stomach.

Because Will is perched, he is nearly the same height as Hannibal, and Hannibal takes full advantage of this fact, wrapping his arms around Will’s slender waist to pull the boy more tightly against him. They both groan as Will’s tiny erection makes contact with his sternum, nearly thrusting into Hannibal’s pectoral muscles. He squeezes Will’s bottom, in love with how perfectly each cheek fits inside of his palms, a handful he never wishes to let go of.

Will pulls away from the kiss first, gulping in breaths, cheeks flushed and eyes dark. "Hannibal, the dough."

"What about it?" Hannibal murmurs, leaning down to press wet, trailing kisses along Will's ear and exposed throat. Will shivers when he reaches the boy's carotid artery, and Hannibal sucks the delicate skin in his mouth, working it with tongue and teeth until he knows there will be a lasting, purple mark on the boy's skin that won't disappear for days.

"The…the…dough…" Will whines, unable to finish his sentence. Hannibal trails his lips from one side of Will's neck to the other, not willing to go without touching the soft skin for even an instant. His lips leave a thin line of wetness in his wake, and he sees goosebumps fluttering to the surface of Will's neck in response to the cool saliva now drying along his skin.

"The oven is still heating up, darling," Hannibal whispers, sucking another mark on the other side of Will's neck. Will squirms beneath him, practically bucking off the counter in his attempt to secure some friction for his tiny cock. Hannibal (reluctantly) lets go of Will's ass with one of his hands, bringing it around Will's waist so that he's palming Will's erection, forcing his hand in-between the nonexistent space between their two bodies.

"*Ah*!" Will cries, arching his neck back. Hannibal follows Will's movement, still kissing and sucking the delicate skin. He moves up to the juncture between Will's ear and neck, licking the shell of Will's ear and then blowing on the moist skin. Will shouts, coming against Hannibal's palm in several short, wet pulses. Hannibal continues rubbing Will's cock until the boy whines. Hannibal sighs, pulling his hand away, and licks the small amount of semen that soaked from Will's boxers onto his palm, delighting in the flavor.

"Delicious as always, my sweet Will. One day I wish to only nourish myself from your body. I'll feast on your cock for breakfast, drink each drop of seed, and then lick the sweat from your skin for lunch. I'll rim you until you cry for dinner, and for dessert, I'll lap each and every tear from your face until all you can think about is my tongue on you. In you."

Will whines and shudders, another small spurt of spend releasing from his tiny cock and soaking the already-moist front of his boxers.

Hannibal sighs, sad that he must release Will in order to clean the kitchen and put the dough into the oven to cook, one layer at a time. He picks up Will's trembling form and sets him onto the floor, surprised when the boy immediately drops to his knees and begins undoing the button on the front of Hannibal's slacks.

"Darling, you don't have to—"

"But I want to," Will says, cerulean eyes lifting to meet Hannibal's gaze and daring him to argue. Hannibal is utterly besotted by Will's eagerness, his desperation to be pleased and to please Hannibal in return.

"Of course. If that is what you wish, far be it from me to stop you."

Will tugs the zipper down. He licks his lips (unconsciously, Hannibal thinks, the boy still has no idea of his sex appeal and doesn't yet know how to seduce someone on purpose, but that is a lesson for another day) at the sight of Hannibal's thick erection inside of his maroon boxers. With a quick pull, Will brings Hannibal's slacks down to his knees. The boy reaches for his boxers next, pulling those down too so that they also sit around Hannibal's knees.

With one last final, seductive glance upward, Will leans forward and places his magnificent lips on the underside of Hannibal's shaft, licking up to the head and then dipping his tongue into the slit to lap at the precum that has welled up.

Will groans at the taste, and fresh precum immediately appears in response to the indecent noise. Hannibal bites his lip and watches Will cup his heavy sac, tenderly massaging each side before gripping the base of Hannibal's cock and swallowing the head all at once.

Will is quickly becoming addicted to the taste of Hannibal's cock. Though this is only the second time he's tasted it, he still remembers the salty-sweet flavor of Hannibal's semen from last time, remembers the musk of his skin, the light sheen of sweat, the bulging vein that runs along the underside and the throbbing flow of blood as Hannibal's cock grows even larger under his hands and lips.

"You're doing so well, darling," Hannibal moans, placing a hand into Will's unruly curls.

Will is sure he looks ridiculous, half-dressed, covered in flour, the front of his boxers still wet and soiled from his own orgasm. Hannibal looks at him as though he hung the moon, as if he is the most precious, erotic thing he's ever seen in his life. It's a look that burns Will to the core and makes him suck harder, deeper. He wants Hannibal lodged so far into his throat that every time he swallows, every time he *breathes* will be a reminder of this moment.

Will reaches up and grasps Hannibal's hand with his own, encouraging him to grip tighter, pull harder. Hannibal complies, and Will rolls his hips at the sudden delicious sting along his scalp, the pleasure-pain he craves so badly burning like a brand along his head and down his spine, landing with a blaze inside of his rapidly growing erection. Will groans and sucks harder, wanting Hannibal to feel even a tenth of the pleasure that Will feels under the older man's talented hands and tongue.

Hannibal grunt and begins to thrust, short gyrations that push his cock just the slightest bit further into Will's mouth. The soft foreskin slides along the roof of his mouth, smearing precum along his salivating tongue. Once Hannibal reaches the back of Will's throat, he stops, keeping his thrusts just shy of painful. Will whines, wanting more, *needing* more.

"Greedy thing," Hannibal says, tugging even tighter on his curls.

Will scrapes his teeth along the head of Hannibal's cock and moves both hands to the base, massaging what doesn't (yet) fit into his mouth. The sounds Will makes are obscene, slurping and sucking and choking on Hannibal's length, each sound amplified by the chrome countertops and tile floor. A thick wad of saliva drips from the corners of Will's stretched lips and lands on the floor with a wet *splat*. Will sucks harder, hoping Hannibal doesn't mind the

mess (and thinking of how hot it would be if Hannibal made Will lick up the fallen saliva as punishment for sullying the floors).

Will can tell Hannibal is close. The head of his cock gets impossibly fatter, hot and heavy where it grinds against his tongue. Hannibal's thighs tremble the barest amount, and his hand yanks tighter on Will's curls, straddling the line between agony and ecstasy. With one last slurp, Hannibal floods Will's mouth with come, shooting his seed directly down the back of Will's throat until Will is choking, unable to breathe or swallow, simply stuck with Hannibal's cock lodged deep inside of him, Hannibal's come sliding down into his stomach, Hannibal's hand in his hair, holding him in place.

Tears fall down Will's face as his head grows light, dizzy. He feels something warm on his thighs and realizes he's come again, orgasm completely unnoticed in the pleasure of choking on Hannibal's thick, hard cock.

"Exquisite," Hannibal hisses, grinding a final time against Will's face before removing his slowly softening erection.

Will immediately coughs, sucking in air too fast and nearly passing out. He gulps down air and cum in equal amounts, finding himself soothed by the salty-sweet liquid as it settles, warm, inside of his stomach.

Hannibal bends down and scoops him up, carrying him upstairs into their bathroom with ease. "You did so wonderful, Mylimasis. You bring me to heights of pleasure I did not know were possible to obtain."

Will squirms in Hannibal's arms, still trying to catch his breath. "I can walk." He coughs once, then twice. "My feet work just fine."

Hannibal sets Will onto the granite vanity of the bathroom and replies, "But I do so enjoy holding you in my arms."

Will has no reply to that, so he lets Hannibal undress him—eyeing the blue dress shirt he stole from Hannibal's closet with satisfaction, remembering the look in Hannibal's eye when he got home and saw Will wearing it—before Hannibal undresses too and they both step into the shower.

After, Will catches a glimpse of his reflection and…his neck looks like he's been mauled. Devoured. Dark red and bright purple bruises litter the pale skin from one side to the other, a necklace of bite marks that make Will feel hot all over again. He presses his fingertips into the tender skin, sparks of arousal shooting down his spine with each touch of pleasure-pain.

"Hannibal," Will says.

Hannibal, wrapped only in a towel, peeks his head back into the bathroom. "Yes?"

Will can't say a word, too enamored with the reflection of the bruises (of Hannibal claiming him in such an animal, prominent way) to look at Hannibal. "Won't it bug you if I look like this when we go out?"

Will, again, has no idea if it is normal for people to have bruises on their necks in public. Growing up, the few trips he made to the store or gas station had all sorts of people, many with their own bruises and bumps. And when Will went to school covered in his own litany of marks, no one (not the teachers, or the nurses, or any of the students who stepped away from him as if he had the plague) said a word. Still, Will has not seen anyone with bruises like this when Hannibal had taken him to the opera or to the harbor, so maybe Will's childhood is not a good judge of what is and isn't socially acceptable.

"I love the way you look now that I've marked you," Hannibal purrs, coming to stand behind Will in the steamy mirror. He breathes each word against the shell of Will's wet ear, and Will shivers, still staring at the mirror, watching the reflection of the two of them move in the fog-covered glass. "However, most people would find it…indecorous for a boy your age to have marks like those. Here," Hannibal says, reaching around Will to open a cabinet door and fetching a small, white jar. "This is arnica cream. It will make the bruises heal faster and appear less prominent."

Will frowns. "But I like them. I don't want them to go away."

Hannibal growls at Will's words, hugging Will's body to his own in a too-tight grip. "Neither do I, Mylimasis, but we have a dinner party next week, and I don't want the guests to think I am neglecting you."

Will sighs and nods his head. "Fine. But next time, no cream."

Hannibal grins, all teeth. "A completely acceptable concession."

They eventually make it back in the kitchen to finish making the *tortas medutis* and…the cake turns out surprisingly well. Will gives Hannibal all the credit for this, certain if he had tried to make the cake himself they would have ended up with a charred pastry or, worse, a charred house.

The next day, Hannibal takes Will to the Rawlings Conservatory (Will in one of Hannibal's scarves, a tartan pattern made of *alpaca* wool, and now Will is desperate to find out what an alpaca is and if he might have one as a pet one day). The weather is cool, a hint of frost in the air, but the inside of the conservatory is warm and muggy, reminding Will of Louisiana. Will breathes in the familiar smell of plants, dirt, and decay with glee, happy to be out of the house and back into…well, if not nature, at least a close approximation of it. Hannibal notices the spring in his step and smiles, looking utterly besotted. Will has to hold back the whine that rises in his throat at being on the receiving end of such a look.

After the conservatory, they head to three different clothing shops to pick up Will's new wardrobe, then go to the grocery store to buy more ingredients for the dinner party.

"Just how many people are coming over?" Will asks, eyeing Hannibal's overflowing basket with a dubious gaze. "I mean, don't you already have a lot of food at home?"

Hannibal smirks, amused. "Darling, each ingredient must be purchased at a different time depending on how it ages or how freshly it must be picked before consumption. Yes, I have 'lots of food' at home, but the best meals are made with the best ingredients."

Will rolls his eyes. “God, you’re such a snob. Fine, okay. But will you grab some more of that rice you used to make the lemongrass risotto? That was really good.”

“Of course.”

Will wonders when he started asking for things expecting to get them rather than expecting (and receiving) disappointment. It has been such a quick change; from twelve years of empty bellies and never receiving anything but what his own hands worked for to the most exquisite meals three times a day and more gifts than he can possibly know what to do with. It makes him feel spoiled, almost as if he is taking advantage of Hannibal. It is only because of his empathy that he can see the absolute joy it gives Hannibal to fulfill his every whim, to provide for him in ways that only Hannibal can.

Will is growing used to it. He thinks he might be growing a little *too* used to it. A small voice in the back of his head (one that grows smaller with each passing day) reminds him of how easy it would be to slip into complacency, only for something terrible to happen to Hannibal and Will ending up left all alone again with nowhere to go and a sense of entitlement that no other person besides Hannibal could love.

“What are you thinking of, Will?” Hannibal asks, loading the last of the groceries into the back of his car. “You’re scrunching up your nose, and that only happens when you are deep in thought.”

Will un-scrunches his nose. “I do not!”

Hannibal smiles and shakes his head. “Of course, darling. My eyes must be getting worse with my old age.”

“Ugh, stop.” Will smiles and climbs into the passenger seat. “You’re the worst.”

“On the contrary, I have it on good authority that I am *awesome*,” Hannibal says, voice deep and solemn.

Will can’t help the peal of laughter that bursts from his throat. “Fine, you’re awesome. And I…don’t want to talk about it.”

Hannibal nods his head. “Very well.” As he pulls the car out onto the busy street, he asks, “Might I suggest something? Feel free to decline, of course, but I was wondering if you might consider taking a DNA test.”

Will frowns, not expecting the sudden change in conversation. “A DNA test? Why? I already know who my dad was. I don’t care about my mom.”

Hannibal tilts his head, considering. “Still, I would be most interested in seeing the results, and not just for your mother. DNA tests can reveal genetic predispositions as well as ancestry.”

Will snorts and taps his thigh, suddenly jittery. “You sound like a salesman or something.”

“Was it a successful pitch?”

Will sighs, forcing his hand to stop tapping and instead pinching the inside of his leg, using the sharp pain to steady himself. “Yeah, okay. What do I have to do?”

Hannibal turns on his blinker, then glances over at Will. “It’s a simple procedure. I just have to swab the inside of your cheek with a q-tip. After that, the sample is sent in for testing, and we receive your results in a couple of weeks.”

“You’ve been thinking about this for a while, haven’t you.”

Hannibal dips his head. “I confess, I have.”

“Well, I guess I’m glad I agreed. You’d have probably bugged me about it for weeks until I said yes, anyway.”

Hannibal sighs, affecting a wounded air. “You hurt me, Mylimasis. I listen when you say no.”

Will rolls his eyes. “Sure. And then you try to convince me you heard wrong, and I didn’t say no, I said maybe.”

They both smile, and Will isn’t the slightest bit surprised to find that Hannibal already has a swabbing kit ready and waiting when they return home. Hannibal swabs his cheek, and they both unload the groceries in companionable silence. Will’s clothes are brought upstairs to their shared bedroom, and Will finds (perhaps too much) satisfaction in hanging his own pants, shirts, and coats alongside Hannibal’s in the huge closet. It’s his own claim on Hannibal; perhaps not as prominent as a bruise, or as permanent as a last name, but a claim nonetheless.

The final days leading up to the dinner party are…chaos.

On Monday, Hannibal comes home from Bedelia’s office and then immediately slips into his plastic jacket, telling Will not to wait up for him as he won’t be returning until late into the night. Will tries to listen, but he has grown used to Hannibal’s warm body against his own, the soft sounds of Hannibal’s breath on the pillow next to his head, and Will finds he cannot fall asleep until Hannibal is safely back inside their bed, pressed against Will’s back with a toned, heavy arm slung around Will’s trim waist.

On Tuesday, a cleaning crew comes and cleans the house from top to bottom, save for the basement, which Will points out to Hannibal with some amusement. Hannibal quirks an eyebrow, clearly not expecting Will to accept this part of his life with such nonchalance. Will then replies that he has been starving his entire life and would have probably eaten his own father if he knew it was an option. Hannibal says that Will has gotten his wish, because they did eat his father. Will then sucks Hannibal until he comes, Hannibal sprawled in front of the fireplace in his armchair, beautiful and strong (and Will is so in love he can barely speak).

On Wednesday, the day of the dinner party, Will wakes with a stomach ache. He knows it is his anxiety manifesting itself and nothing more, but he still gulps down an extra serving of orange juice in case it is a cold or some illness brought on by the cool weather.

Hannibal remains in the kitchen the entire day, not leaving once breakfast has been prepared and eaten. Though Hannibal usually works on Wednesdays, Bedelia has agreed to switch his schedule this week so that instead he works on Thursday (the day of Thanksgiving). This was an easy bargain for Hannibal to make, since no one else had wanted to come in on the holiday. Hannibal, however, had not grown up celebrating it, and he told Will he couldn't care less about a day of giving thanks when he did that every time he woke up and saw Will in his bed. Will had, of course, turned bright red at this statement, and then they—

"Will, would you like to go get changed into your suit? Our guests should be arriving in an hour or so."

Will blushes, hoping that Hannibal is not privy to where his current train of thought had wandered. "Yeah, sure. Will you help me with the cuff links?"

"Of course, darling." Hannibal sends a blazing look his way, one full of heat and promise, and Will shudders before leaving the kitchen and heading upstairs.

It's a good thing Hannibal gave him an hour to get dressed; it takes Will nearly twenty minutes just to button his shirt and tuck it into the suit pants, both of which are ridiculously tight. Though Hannibal has ordered him several new suits the past week, none were ready in time for the party tonight. Will is partially glad; he has never worn this suit before—it's a dove gray, with a light pinstripe pattern that glistens when Will twists his torso—and it seems such a waste to donate it before Will got a chance to try it on himself, especially since it was made just for him.

Hannibal comes into the bedroom thirty minutes before the guests are due to arrive, quickly stripping off the clothing he has been cooking in all day and donning a suit the same shade as Will's, though the pinstripes on his are a baby pink rather than a different shade of gray. The two of them make quite the pair in the bathroom, Will slathering styling gel into his unruly curls while Hannibal artfully brushes his dark hair out of his face, and it magically stays, no product needed.

"Here," Hannibal murmurs, taking a bottle of (no doubt far-too expensive) cologne and dabbing a small amount along the pulse points of Will's neck, gently caressing the faint outline of bruises that can't be seen unless Will is standing directly under a bright light—lucky for him, both the kitchen, dining room, and living room all have low levels of light, so it would be nearly impossible for anyone (besides Hannibal with his superior sight) to see what is left of his bruises.

Will breathes in deeply, becoming aroused simply by the spicy, musky smell of Hannibal's cologne. It fills his lungs no matter which way he turns, no matter how far or close he is to Hannibal, and he wishes he could wear this cologne every day as a reminder of who he belongs to.

"Thanks," Will says, voice slightly breathless. Hannibal chuckles and applies some cologne to his own neck, adding a few dabs to each of his wrists.

Hannibal puts on Will's cuff links—another new pair, this time a set of morganite gems set in white gold, and Will remembers hearing the delight in the salesperson's voice when Hannibal

had selected this pair, so he knows they cost much more than any small item of jewelry should—and Will suddenly realizes that the gems of his cuff links match the pink of Hannibal's suit.

"How far in advance do you plan your outfits?" Will asks, incredulous. In reality, he feels even warmer at the thought of just how much the two of them match, even down to the minute details of the gems on Will's wrists and the cologne ringing his neck.

"Long enough," is Hannibal's cryptic answer. Will rolls his eyes and huffs, breathing in another draw of cologne, a drug that seeps into his lungs and sets his veins on fire.

In the distance, the doorbell rings.

Will's veins turn from fire to ice, anxiety and fear coursing through his body like a glacial river, wiping away any joy he was having simply from being in Hannibal's presence.

Hannibal notices him tense up (perhaps he even smells the fear that pours off Will in thick waves) and runs a soothing hand along his back. He eventually rests his broad palm at the curve of Will's lower back, right where his spine ends and the curve of his ass begins.

"Breathe, Mylimasis. You did so well during the opera and even better during our dinner the other night. This will be a much better setting. Mason Verger cannot intrude on our peace, and if you ever feel too overwhelmed, you are welcome to go to our bedroom and rest."

Will sighs, forcing his body to relax, one excruciating muscle at a time. By the time he is lax against Hannibal's palm, the doorbell has rung a second time.

Hannibal frowns—no doubt the second ring was a breach of some unknown etiquette that Will will never understand—and removes his hand from Will's back.

They both walk downstairs to greet their first guest, a united front. Hannibal places his hand once more on Will's back when they reach the front door, and Will draws strength from the warm, broad palm, the way it spans from one side of his waist to the other. He sinks back against it and Hannibal doesn't even flinch, providing more support as a counterpoint to Will's weight.

Hannibal reaches forward with his other hand and opens the door. A group of people Will has never seen before all croon at the sight of him and Hannibal together, voices rising in pitch until the noise is grating against Will's ears.

"*Hannibal*! You never said your son was such an adorable specimen. Look at those blue eyes. I never saw such eyes! And your matching suits, too. Absolutely adorable."

The woman who is speaking leans forward, revealing the deep neck of her dress and showing off her cleavage for Hannibal's (uncaring) gaze. She stands back up straight and walks into the foyer, handing Hannibal her coat with another lean forward.

Will wants to growl, to smack that ridiculous simper off her face and push her out the door until she's sprawling on the frost-covered lawn, freezing in her too-tight, too-short dress. He

wants—

The rest of the crowd comes inside, each more annoying than the last. This must be the group of socialites that Hannibal had mentioned; no respectable doctor or nurse (and Will guesses Hannibal would not invite any of his former colleagues unless they were respectable) would be so…tactile. Each of the socialites, whether wearing a wedding ring or not, finds some way to touch Hannibal as they pass into the dining room. One man—who has a fake French accent so outrageous it makes Will want to speak his own type of French just to cover the sound—leans over to kiss both sides of Hannibal's cheek, a mimicry of the European style of greeting. His lips linger on Hannibal's sharp cheekbones (the ones Will had kissed that very morning when he woke) and leave pink chapstick stains behind which he quickly cleans off with a gratuitous touch, rubbing his pointer finger back and forth over Hannibal's skin to remove the stain. Another man cups Hannibal's hand as Hannibal removes the man's coat. One of the older women "drops" her purse and then caresses Hannibal's arm in thanks when he picks it up for her.

Will pinches the bridge of his nose and forces himself to stop seeing red. He had expected some level of familiarity from the people that Hannibal invited, but for each of these guests to be so blatant in their flirtations, in their desire of Hannibal…it is not something he could have prepared for.

Will realizes, then, how filthy rich Hannibal must be for even those that are married to try and make a pass. Not only is Hannibal outrageously rich, he is also outrageously beautiful, and apparently this deadly combination is too much for the upper echelon of Baltimore to handle.

When each of the guests is finally parted from their coats and guided to the dining room, Hannibal looks back at Will with a mixture of annoyance and humor on his face—the annoyance from the way he was touched, the humor from Will's obvious jealousy.

"Will, darling, you look rather…feral at the moment."

Will feels feral. He parts his lips in a grimace, baring his teeth as if he might bite. Hannibal's flare of arousal at the gesture does not help curb the instinct, though instead of wanting to bite Hannibal's guests, he instead wants to sink his teeth into Hannibal's neck, the meat of his thighs, the thick muscles of his abdomen.

The doorbell rings, and Hannibal gives him one last burning glance before opening it up.

For the next fifteen minutes, guests trickle in from the cold outside, none as tactile as the first group that came in. Mrs. Komeda and her husband are a breath of fresh air, tart-tongued but able to keep their hands to themselves. Will gives them both his first genuine smile of the evening before they go into the kitchen where Hannibal has set up a bar with far too much alcohol for the amount of guests they are expecting.

Finally, when hope has blossomed in Will's chest that perhaps something happened and Bedelia could not show up after all, the doctor arrives at the doorstep. She knocks instead of ringing the doorbell, and when Hannibal opens the door to admit her in…she is so much worse than Will could imagine.

Tall, nearly the same height as Hannibal. Gorgeous blonde hair tucked into a graceful bun at the back of her swan-like neck. Perfect skin that glows even in the low light of the foyer, wide blue eyes surrounded by thick, mascara-covered lashes. A tasteful gown and equally tasteful perfume. Long legs that end in dainty heels.

Will's anger (his jealousy) flares up at the thought that *this* is who Hannibal spends his time with three days a week. This is who controls Hannibal's work, who learns his thoughts when he is away from Will, who will decide the trajectory of his career. The thought of how much influence Bedelia has over Hannibal makes Will want to scream. To pull out each strand of white-blonde hair off her perfectly coiffed head and throw it to the ground. To—

Instead, Will smiles and holds out his hand just as Hannibal taught him, refusing to look her (or any of the guests) in the eye.

"Hello," he murmurs, voice the picture of politeness. "It's so nice to meet you, Dr. Du Maurier."

Bedelia accepts his hand, her long fingers curling over his own and giving him a few short pumps. "And I, you, Mr. Lecter. Hannibal speaks so highly of you, I started to wonder how someone could possibly live up to such high praise. But I see now that none of it was false."

Will smiles (grimaces) and pulls his hand away. "Thank you. I have heard good things about you, too. Hannibal really enjoys working with you."

Will, who is staring at Bedelia's chin, can see her nodding her head. "That is very high praise, indeed. Thank you."

She turns to Hannibal, and he helps her remove her coat, touch nothing but perfunctory.

It still makes Will's teeth ache, just *begging* him to sink his mouth into warm, weak flesh. He bites his bottom lip and sucks on the blood, soothing himself with the coppery taste.

"I believe you are the last guest to arrive," Hannibal says. He gestures toward the dining room, where the sound of people talking and laughing is growing louder by the minute as more and more alcohol is consumed. "Please, this way."

Bedelia dips her head, ever the picture of grace, and follows Hannibal into the dining room. Will trails behind them, eyes shooting daggers into the back of Bedelia's form-fitting dress.

Inside the dining room, there is not much room to spare, each inch filled with bodies and delicate glass flutes and silky material that probably costs more than his father's entire yearly salary. There are two distinct groups that have formed, one on each side of the dinner table like battle lines being drawn. The socialites (include Mrs. Komeda and her husband) stand to the side near the mini bar, drinks sloshing already onto the tile floor, voices loud and chattering. On the other side of the room, Hannibal's old colleagues drink far less vigorously, voices lowered to match the solemn ambiance of the room. Hannibal walks down the length of the table, Moses parting the Red Sea, and stands at the head of the table.

The entire room grows quiet. There is an air of anticipation that Will had not expected, and he feels himself get swept up in the excitement, the thrill of sitting at Hannibal's table and eating his food (of knowing where that food came from and why it is so special).

"Thank you," Hannibal says, voice polite and unsurprised at the control he has over the room. "Before we begin, I must warn you…" and at these words, the entire room holds its breath at once, completely overtaken by Hannibal's voice, the low, smooth way his accent curls around each syllable, as if each one given is a gift from his mouth, "…nothing here is vegetarian. *Bon appetit*."

At this, the entire room breaks out into giggles.

Swine. All of them are swine. They are eating up Hannibal's words just as they will be eating up human flesh, none the wiser, empty praises falling from equally empty minds.

Will looks over at Hannibal and rolls his eyes, conveying just how unimpressed he is with Hannibal's theatrics. Hannibal smiles back, bemused, and sits down. Will sits at the seat to his right, trying not to frown when he notices Bedelia has taken the seat to Hannibal's left, directly across from Will.

Will is content to sit and listen during the meal, much more interested in observing than being a part of the conversation. Hannibal gets up periodically and goes to the kitchen to grab another dish, each met with *oohs* and *aahs* as they are set on the gleaming table. Hannibal accepts the praise with grace, an air of smugness about him that would be infuriating on anyone else but simply makes Hannibal look even more handsome.

During dinner, Will allows his empathy to flow out of him, making brief contact with several of the guests and learning far more about their personal lives than he has any wish to. There are two seated next to one another that are having an affair. The woman to Bedelia's left is taking some sort of illegal drug, though Will can't be sure what (Hannibal probably knows, can probably smell it on her breath). Several of the doctors and nurses are embroiled in some sort of scheme, something to do with selling prescriptions under the radar in conjunction with an insurance company.

Will notices all of this with indifference, merely an idle observer. Bedelia speaks to him several times, and Will answers with short (but polite) responses. Instead of talking, he watches her interactions with Hannibal, far more interested in how the two of them interact. There is almost a…slyness to both of their words, a game of cat-and-mouse, and Will leans forward in his seat to hear better.

"How did Hannibal snatch you up?" the woman to his right asks.

Will curses inside his head and sits back in his seat, turning to stare at the woman's chin. It's the same woman from earlier who kept flashing her cleavage at Hannibal.

"He adopted me from Louisiana," Will replies, hoping his cool tone is enough to dissuade her from asking anymore personal questions.

It is not.

“Oh, how wonderful! My family owns a château there. Just a little summer getaway when Baltimore gets too stifling.” She giggles, as if she just said something witty, and takes another drink from her rapidly-emptying glass of wine. “Such a pretty place, though not always safe, if you know what I mean.”

Will’s face is solid stone, unmoving and unyielding. “I don’t.”

The woman hiccups, then frowns. “You know. The crime from all the…other folks there.”

“Other folk?” Will asks, pretending confusion. He wonders if the woman is drunk enough (or racist enough) to just come out and say what she is thinking.

She is either both of things, or a third option that Will is beginning to suspect is the case: she is simply stupid. “You know, all the colored folk that stayed after the war ended. Louisiana has the highest rate of violent crime in the nation, did you know? It’s no wonder, really. It’s not their fault, it’s just in their DNA.”

The table has gone silent around them, and Will notes with some amusement that several of the guests are people of color and have probably heard every word of her tirade. The woman tilts her head as if just noticing all attention is now on her, and flushes a rather garish shade of pink.

“Sorry, this wine is quite strong,” she murmurs, eyes lowered and lashes fluttering, as if her face will detract from the vile words that just came out of her mouth.

With a frown that would make a lesser man tremble, Hannibal says, “I would appreciate all conversations at this table to be respectful and polite. If that is too much for some, they are welcome to leave.”

The woman’s face turns from pink to purple, and she chokes down the rest of her wine with too much force. “Apologies. I didn’t mean it.”

Will rolls his eyes (and if he keeps doing that tonight, he might end up with a headache) and turns to see how Hannibal will handle this social dilemma.

With poise, Hannibal tilts his head, neither accepting nor rejecting her apology. Then he says, “I suppose I must apologize, then, for the strength of the wine. I brewed it myself while I was working as an emergency surgeon. As you can imagine, my schedule was quite busy. I might have left it sitting for a few years too long…”

The table laughs, relaxing at the elegant segue, and continues eating their meal.

The woman next to him doesn’t try to speak to him for the rest of the night.

For dessert, Hannibal has made a *tarte Tatin* out of caramelized apples. Will’s heart warms at the sight, remembering the apple tart Hannibal bought for him a few months ago, one of the first desserts he had ever tasted in his life. Hannibal stares as Will picks up his fork and stabs it into the delicate pastry. He brings the bite to his lips before letting out a small moan as the sweet fruit and flaky crust melts on his tongue.

“It’s good,” Will tells him, voice soft and sincere, and Hannibal melts like the sugar on his tongue, a look of pure adoration coloring his magnificent features.

“I’m glad,” he says, and Will smiles around his fork.

After dessert, the table is cleared off, and the guests are directed to the living room, which has been pre-staged with clean glasses and even more alcohol. Will stands by Hannibal’s side the remaining hour or so, listening with less and less attention as guests come and feed Hannibal compliments even more syrupy sweet than the dessert they just consumed.

It is not until everyone has left—Bedelia the last to leave, with a promise to see Hannibal the following morning—that Will is finally able to relax, melting into Hannibal’s side with a quiet groan.

“You survived, Mylimasis,” Hannibal says, voice warm and soft. “I am so proud of you.”

Will whines at the words, suddenly needing Hannibal’s mouth covering his own, Hannibal’s fingers in his hair, Hannibal’s body pressed against every inch of his. Hannibal sees his want and mirrors it, leaning down to lick into Will’s lax mouth.

“Take me upstairs,” Will whispers, clutching the lapels of Hannibal’s suit, uncaring if he wrinkles the fabric.

With a low growl, Hannibal lifts Will into his arms, kissing against his neck as they make their way from the living room to the stairs, still holding tight as they walk down the hallway and finally into the bedroom. Hannibal lays Will down on the mattress and crawls over his body, lips already swollen and spit-slick from just a few minutes of kissing. Will rolls his hips, utterly aroused and wearing far too many clothes.

“Hannibal,” he says, gathering his courage.

“Yes, darling?” Hannibal asks, stroking a gentle hand across his cheek, thumbing at the corner of his mouth.

“I want you inside of me tonight. I want…I want you to fill me up. Properly.” Will feels embarrassed at the dirty words, but the sight of Hannibal’s pupils dilating so that the maroon disappears from his eyes gives Will the strength to carry on. “Will you make love to me?”

Hannibal groans, lowering his mouth to lick his tongue across Will’s lips, indulging for a moment before retreating back. “You have no idea how much your words affect me. I would be honored to make love to you, darling. I promise to make tonight one of infinite pleasure for you.”

Will whimpers and rolls his hips, again frustrated by the tight fabric of his suit pants, nearly losing circulation in his legs from the uncomfortable fit. “I hope that pleasure involves both of us naked.”

With a low chuckle, Hannibal quickly unzips and removes Will’s pants, folding them and placing them on the nightstand before taking off his suit jacket and giving it the same

treatment. By the time Hannibal is taking Will's boxers off his legs, his entire body is a trembling, sweating mess, so aroused he is nearly in pain, each caress of Hannibal's hand against his skin a lit fire that licks across his body and sears into his leaking erection.

"You too," Will whines, pushing Hannibal's jacket off his toned arms and chucking it the ground, amused at the pained expression that crosses Hannibal's face. "If you wanted it done right, you should have done it yourself," Will says. He unbuttons Hannibal's shirt, tossing that to the ground as well.

"I've created a monster," Hannibal murmurs, eyes warm and burning into Will's own gaze.

"Yes," Will agrees, shucking off Hannibal's pants and boxers at the same time, licking his lips once Hannibal's large, swollen erection is finally exposed. "Your monster would like to taste you now."

Hannibal grasps Will's hair and tugs on it, forcefully pulling Will's head down until he's breathing on Hannibal's cock but not touching it. When he tries to bend forward to lick at the head, Hannibal's grasp tightens, tugging Will's curls even harder to send shocks of pain across his scalp, and Will moans at the sensation, body shivering and shaking apart.

"Please," he whimpers. "I want to taste you so badly."

With a snarl, Hannibal shoves Will's mouth onto his cock, immediately thrusting into Will's mouth without allowing him a second to adjust. The swollen head of his cock surges past Will's soft palate, landing in the back of his throat. Will moans around the sudden intrusion, sucking and slurping at whatever he is given, enjoying the taste of Hannibal's precum even more than the apple tart that Hannibal made for dessert. Hannibal thrusts deeper, cock lodging further inside of Will's throat than it's ever been before. Will chokes on it, gag reflex screaming at him to remove the bulky column of flesh, but Hannibal grants him no such courtesy. He presses inside until Will is lightheaded from a lack of oxygen, then pulls out (a brief reprieve) before immediately thrusting back in.

Will's eyes water, and he chokes again, saliva spilling out from the edges of his mouth and landing, messily, on the few inches of Hannibal's cock he hasn't been able to swallow. He whines, wanting all of Hannibal inside of his mouth, and clutches at Hannibal's thick thighs, begging the man to thrust deeper, use him more.

Hannibal yanks on Will's curls and tugs his head down those last few inches, shoving the remainder of his cock inside of Will's throat. It slides down, the broad head rubbing along Will's esophagus, so deep it feels as though Hannibal might force himself into Will's stomach if he pushed just a little further. Will trembles at the lack of air, at the pressure against his gag reflex, at the feel of Hannibal's pubic hair tickling against his lips. Will can smell Hannibal's musk, each shaky inhale bringing in the heady scent, the source of which is just outside his nose.

Hannibal retreats, then slams back inside, working his cock in and out of Will's throat as if that were all Will was good for, a warm, tight hole for Hannibal to fuck. The thought sends stars of pleasure ricocheting through Will's mind, and he moans—needy and long—around

Hannibal's length. Hannibal twitches inside of him, a thick drop of precum sliding down his throat and settling, warm, inside of his belly.

With a few more hard thrusts, Hannibal yanks Will's head off his cock, a shiny trail of saliva connecting Will to the erection which had just been lodged deep inside of him. It fills him with pride, the fact that Hannibal's entire, large cock was inside his throat. He rubs a palm against his own tiny erection, even more turned on at the size difference between the two.

"Turn around," Hannibal growls, reaching over Will to grab the lubricant out of the nightstand.

With a full-body shiver, Will does as he's commanded, turning so that his belly is on the mattress, his back (and ass) completely exposed to Hannibal's whims. He shivers again when a cool, wet finger prods his hole, sliding in without waiting for Will's body to open naturally.

"I know you can take it, darling. Always so eager to be stuffed full, whether it's on my cock or my fingers. One day I'll lick you open and get you so sloppy and wet that my cock is able to slide inside of you without any lubricant at all. I bet your hole would like that, hm?"

Will moans and grinds his erection into the mattress, unable to decide whether he likes the friction of the blanket against his cock or the friction of Hannibal's finger inside of his hole, more. He decides it doesn't matter which he likes better; he has both, and he rocks his body back and forth between the dual sensations, hips rolling and grinding like waves in the sea.

Hannibal adds a second finger not long after the first, scissoring them against Will's tight opening. Will shudders and pauses his thrusting, too overcome by the feeling of Hannibal's thick fingers twisting inside of him to move. Hannibal finds his prostate with unnerving accuracy, rubbing against it and making Will cry into the empty air, so full of pleasure (of Hannibal) he feels he might burst.

And Hannibal isn't even inside of him yet. Will wonders how that thick cock will possibly fit inside his small hole; it will rip in half. The thought of his body ripping in half, being split open by nothing more than Hannibal's throbbing erection, is enough to send Will spiraling into orgasm, his hole clenching and pulsing around Hannibal's two fingers.

"That's it, darling. I plan on bringing you to orgasm several times tonight. And look at your hole now, so much more loose and open after you've taken your pleasure. It's like you were made for me, Will."

Will nods, feeling lightheaded and drunk, before resting his chin against his pillow. The fingers in his ass continue to scissor, widening his hole further and further into Hannibal can slip a third finger inside without any discomfort.

"Please," Will whispers. "Please, I need you inside."

"Shh, my sweet boy. Almost there now."

Will shudders, raising his ass higher in the air, presenting himself to Hannibal in the hopes that it will spur the older man into action. Instead of giving Will his cock, though, Hannibal

slides his fingers out of Will's ass and leaves him empty, gaping.

"Hannibal," Will whines.

Hannibal flips him over so that they are face to face. Will's head spins for a moment, and when he's able to see again, he suddenly wishes he had a camera to photograph the scene before him (though Will's brain is as good as any camera, and this image of Hannibal will certainly be seared into his mind until the end of time).

Hannibal's fingers grip Will's waist, no doubt leaving bruises on the delicate, pale skin. One of his hands is slick and wet from the lubricant, and the viscous liquid spreads over Will's hipbone, coating it in the shiny substance. Hannibal's chest is flushed and sweaty, and the shine of his skin is only muted by the thick smattering of chest hair covering his sculpted muscles. The flush spreads up Hannibal's neck and onto his face, a deep red sitting so prettily along his sharp cheekbones, a contrast to the messy dark hair on his head. His eyes are black, two burning coals that stare at Will with such hunger he isn't sure how he isn't being consumed from Hannibal's gaze alone.

"You're so beautiful," Will says. He wonders if he's ever told Hannibal before. Hannibal is constantly praising him, telling him how beautiful and pretty and wonderful he is. Will feels ashamed that it took until this moment for him to say it back.

The flush on Hannibal's cheeks deepens. His lashes flutter, lowering to Will's lips. "Your words mean everything to me, darling."

Hannibal leans down, and they kiss one another, licking the leftover dessert from one another's lips and tongues. Hannibal also tastes of wine, sweet yet sour, and Will licks the remaining alcohol from off of Hannibal's tongue, thrusting his own tongue into Hannibal's mouth as Hannibal's fingers had just thrust into him.

Finally, they both part to breathe, and Hannibal runs a delicate hand along Will's ribs, stopping at his nipple.

"Are you sure, Will?" Hannibal asks, breathless. "I will not think any different of you if you don't wish to go any further."

"Hannibal," Will replies, aching and empty and wishing Hannibal were inside of him ten minutes ago. "Please stick your cock inside of me."

With a snarl that is more beast than animal, Hannibal slides his hands under Will's thighs and parts his legs wider, wider, until they rest on Hannibal's legs, straddling the man's waist. Hannibal slicks his cock with the remaining lubricant on his hand and lines it up to Will's clenching hole, the head of his throbbing erection kissing Will's entrance, warm and wet and impossibly wide.

Will tilts his head forward, wanting to see as much as he can, wanting to witness the moment when Hannibal makes him *his* for the first time.

Slowly, steadily, Hannibal pushes inside of Will, each inch of surrendered flesh causing a shiver to run up Will's spine. By the time Hannibal's pelvis is kissing the bottom of Will's ass, Will is a shivering, trembling mess, so full he feels as though there is no room left in his body for air, for thoughts, for anything but *Hannibal*. The man's cock is so large that it automatically presses against Will's prostate without him having to move, and the constant, steady pressure is driving Will mad, teasing him without giving him relief.

"Please," he whimpers. "Please." He doesn't even know what he's begging for. He just knows that he is fuller than he has ever been in his life, stuffed to the brim with Hannibal, and it is the single most pleasurable thing he has ever experienced.

And then Hannibal begins to move.

The Lecter Household

Chapter Summary

Hannibal receives an unexpected call from Chiyoh.

Hannibal has *never* experienced such pleasure as Will's tight, virgin hole slowly opening for him, swallowing up his cock as if greedy for every inch of throbbing flesh, every drop of precum, every press of Hannibal's skin against his own.

"*Mylimasis*," Hannibal says, slowly pulling out of that exquisite heat before pushing back in. "You were *made* for this. Your hole is sucking me in so sweetly, begging for me to stay. How shall I ever part from your body after tonight? I wish to live inside of you, climb under your skin and stay there, never to leave."

Will whines at Hannibal's words, flushed and trembling and moaning without pause, each inch of Hannibal's cock that forces its way inside Will's body causing the boy to shake harder, beg louder.

Hannibal pulls all the way out before slamming back in, knocking his pelvis against the soft globes of Will's ass, delighting in the way the flesh jiggles against the brutal impact. Will keens, head thrown back, hips tilted up to give Hannibal complete access to his body. The boy's tiny cock is throbbing, leaking, dripping precum onto the taut skin of his pale stomach. It smears into the paltry patch of pubic hair underneath his cock, turning the black, curly hair a milky white.

"*Ha…Han…Hannibal*!" Will cries, each powerful thrust causing a wounded moan to exit from the boy's red mouth. His eyes are shut, completely lost to each sensation, and Hannibal shifts Will's legs even further apart in his lap, kneeling forward to get better leverage to pound into the boy. At this angle, Hannibal's cock is pointing downward, straight into Will's prostate, and with each brutal thrust the boy screams out in unbearable pleasure.

The clamp of Will's hole around Hannibal's swollen, aching erection is unlike anything he has known before. No pleasure is comparable; no other sexual partner he has had, or food he has eaten, or kill he has committed. Nothing is better than this, the exquisite feel of Will's silky-soft insides swallowing each inch of Hannibal's cock as he rocks back and forth, back and forth, pounding into Will with a brutality that should have been painful, but Will took each thrust like a born-and-bred cock slut, body opening wider and then begging for more.

"Is this what you wanted, Will?" Hannibal asks, out of breath from the pace he has set. His skin is slick with sweat, a few beads dripping down his forehead. The droplets glance off his temples and slide to his jaw. With a particularly harsh grind against Will's hole, the sweat drips off of Hannibal's chin and then falls onto Will's flushed stomach, mixing with the

precum smeared over his abdomen. Without pausing his incessant plunge into Will's body, Hannibal leans down and licks up the mixture of sweat and precum, moaning at the salty taste on his tongue and thrusting a little bit harder, infinitely aroused at the taste of both his and Will's fluids combined.

"Hannibal," Will cries. "It's so big. So good." His throat is raw, scratchy, overworked from screaming in pleasure for so long. The tip of Will's cock is bright purple and leaking an obscene amount of precum.

"You like this?" Hannibal groans, undulating his hips in an *S* shape and grinding the fat head of his cock against Will's abused prostate. "You will feel so *empty* now without my cock inside of you, darling. I might have to keep you filled with my cum at all times, just so that emptiness doesn't consume you. Would you like that, Will? A steady dose of my cum, fresh from my cock, inside your hole every day? To keep you warm and full, no matter whether I am inside you or not?"

Will cries, tears flowing from his bright blue eyes and landing on the pillow beside his messy, sweaty curls. "Please," he whimpers. "Please give me your cum."

How could Hannibal resist such a plea? With a low groan, he picks up the pace once more, enamored with the loud *slap slap slap* of skin as his balls hit the bottom of Will's plush bottom with each of his thrusts. Each plunge of his cock inside of Will is accompanied by a choked-off moan from the boy's trembling throat, the sound raspy and harsh as if pushed out of Will's body by Hannibal's cock shoving into him from below.

"I'm gonna—" Will throws his head back, each tendon in his neck flexing and bulging, and comes with a final, keening cry. His tiny cock spurts semen onto his abdomen, a few drops landing on his chin.

Hannibal shoves himself into that tight heat once, twice, before groaning and spilling into Will's hole. He grinds into Will's body, pushing his load deep into the boy as if he could shove his seed far enough into Will that it would never come out. Will's hole clenches and throbs around him from the boy's own orgasm. It milks the cum from Hannibal's cock, almost like Will's body is sucking him in to ensure that no seed goes to waste, not a single drop allowed to escape from the boy.

"Mylimasis…" Hannibal breathes, keeping his cock inside of Will as he leans down to kiss Will's sweat-soaked temple, not yet ready to leave the slick space—now even wetter from his seed—that he's carved for himself inside of Will's body. "My darling. My heart. You are the most perfect, beautiful creature the heavens could have possibly created. Your body is the most exquisite creation in existence, and I am humbled to be able to give you pleasure each and every day."

Will looks up at Hannibal, love swimming in his tear-soaked eyes. Hannibal licks the tears leaking from the corners, lapping until Will's face is cleared of anything but the lingering moisture from sweat. Hannibal continues licking down Will's face, pausing to clean up the semen that managed to make itself at home on Will's pointed chin, before licking down Will's throat and sucking a throbbing bruise into one of Will's tendons. Hannibal continues to clean up Will's cum, not stopping until he reaches Will's tiny, spent cock. Hannibal's own

cock has softened by now, and he slowly slips it out of Will's body, immediately regretting the loss of heat, of tightness, of pure *ecstasy*. There is nothing that can compare to being inside of Will, and now that Hannibal has had a taste, he is immediately addicted. He vows that he will taste Will like this again and again, in every position, in every setting, in every way possible.

A trickle of seed spills from Will's (still clenching) hole, and Hannibal leans down to lick it up, tasting his own spend as well as Will's natural bodily fluids. Hannibal moans at the taste and continues licking, ignoring Will's whine as the boy's (no doubt incredibly over-sensitive) hole is once more stimulated. Hannibal throws Will's legs over his shoulders and keeps licking at the delicate flesh until no more of his seed is leaking out, all of it either remaining inside of Will or stored in Hannibal's stomach.

Will digs his heels into Hannibal's back, a call for attention, and Hannibal sighs, wiping a hand over his wettened mouth and sitting up to check on his boy.

"Are you alright, dear?" he asks. Yes, Will had achieved orgasm, but Hannibal had been… quite passionate for Will's first time, especially considering how small Will is.

Will nods his head once, smiling. "Yes, Hannibal. It was…perfect." Will's face is flushed, his hair mussed and coated in sweat. His eyes shine with happiness and contentment. His lips are reddened, covered in a thin sheen of saliva. A purple-blue bruise is starting to form at the base of Will's neck, right at the juncture of his clavicle. It sits like a jewel, a necklace made from teeth and tongue rather than metal.

Hannibal has never seen anything more glorious in his life.

"*You* are perfect. I could not have asked for a better companion in my life, nor could I have envisioned one."

"Stop being so sappy," Will mutters, cheeks turning a darker shade of red. He bites his bottom lip and looks up at Hannibal from beneath his thick, black lashes. "Will you hold me?"

"I could think of no greater pleasure." Hannibal leans down on the bed, pressing his body against Will so that Will is lying flat and Hannibal is curled against Will's left side. Hannibal wraps an arm around Will's trim waist and pulls the boy even closer, not minding in the slightest the dampness of their skin, the smell of sex and musk in the air, the exhaustion in his thigh muscles from how hard he had taken his boy. He hopes he is still sore tomorrow whenever he stands or stretches, a delicious reminder of how well he had taken Will, how well Will had taken *him*.

They lay like that, unmoving, unspeaking, for a long time. Will slips off to sleep after only a few minutes, and Hannibal stares at the boy's lovely face, drinking in each perfect feature like a man starved.

Eventually, though, the slide of their cooled skin turns from pleasant to uncomfortable, and Hannibal goes into the bathroom and brings back a wet washcloth. He wipes the tackiness from Will's skin first, laughing quietly at Will's puckered frown and sleepily murmured

protests. His own body is next, cleaned with quick, effective swipes of the washcloth over his torso, legs, and arms. Hannibal puts the dirty cloth in the proper hamper and quickly walks back to the bed, unwilling to be away from his boy for even a moment longer than is necessary.

As Hannibal falls asleep—pressed against Will's side, his nose nuzzling the silky, musky skin of Will's neck—his last thought is of love, and how he always assumed he wasn't capable of feeling it at all, especially so deeply, after the death of Mischa.

Oh, how wrong the incredible boy in his arms has proved that theory to be.

In the morning, it is with a heavy heart—and even heavier limbs—that Hannibal leaves the bed to get ready for his day. Bedelia was kind enough to allow him to come into work later due to the holiday, and Hannibal uses the extra few hours to finish tidying the downstairs. There are various glasses—some full, some empty—strewn about the living room and kitchen. Each of the plates from dinner needs to be washed, the countertops wiped down and sanitized, the extra leaves removed from the table and the remaining wood pushed back into place. By the time Hannibal has finished cleaning, he only has a few minutes to shower, change, kiss Will on the cheek (amazed how much the boy needs to sleep, then smug at being the one to cause such fatigue) and then drive to Bedelia's at a semi-legal speed.

"Good morning, Hannibal," Bedelia greets, wearing a lovely orange sweater over her typical subdued button-down. There is the slightest croak in her voice, perhaps the lingering effects of a hangover, though Hannibal does not recall Bedelia indulging as much as some of the other guests last night (which reminds Hannibal that he needs to put Linda Roche on his do-not-invite list, if not putting her on the menu for his next dinner party).

"Good morning, Bedelia. I trust you had a pleasant night's sleep?"

Bedelia quirks a carefully manicured eyebrow and tilts her chin downward. "I did, thank you. Your party was as wonderful as everyone claimed it would be. I am amazed at how you managed to cook for two dozen people by yourself."

"It is a passion of mine to provide for others and to have them nourished by my own hands."

"Is that why you took on Will? To nourish him by your own hands instead of someone else's?"

"I did not realize that the therapy session today would be mine, Dr. Du Maurier."

Bedelia straightens her spine and smiles, though it is thin and brittle, a piece of taffy stretched too far. "Forgive me, Hannibal. It is hard for people like you and I to stop what our minds are trained to do."

"Being trained to do, in my case." There's a knock on the door of Bedelia's office. After a moment of silence, Bedelia's assistant pokes her head inside, eyes bright and perky as always. She blushes when she sees Hannibal, a flattering shade of pink rising to her cheeks (though all Hannibal can think is that Will's blush is far more flattering).

“I’m sorry Dr. Du Maurier. I just wanted to let you know that Mr. Verger called again. He was quite…insistent you answer him this time.”

Bedelia sighs and schools her features, but not before letting a shred of annoyance slip through her mask, one that is nearly as carefully-constructed as Hannibal’s own. “I see. Thank you, Lisa.”

Lisa nods her head before ducking back out of the room.

“Mason Verger?” Hannibal asks, looking back to Bedelia, intrigued. “I did not…think him to be the type to seek out any sort of professional treatment.”

Bedelia stands, straightening her sweater. “He’s not. He is, however, the type to seek out treatment for his sister. He has been pestering poor Lisa for several weeks on the matter, and it seems no matter what I say, he will not be swayed.”

Hannibal pauses, considering. Then, “I could take on Ms. Verger as a patient. Under your direction and counsel, of course. I understand how full your current patient load is at the moment.”

Bedelia’s eyes narrow the slightest amount, as if asking Hannibal why he is suddenly keen to take on his own patient when he has never expressed any interest in the past. True, he has only been working with Bedelia for a few months now, but in that time he has only attended therapy sessions as an observer, never as a participant. “You wish to have your own patient? I would not always be able to be there for the sessions; perhaps I would attend the first month of treatment, then every other week after that.”

“Now is as good a time as any to begin,” Hannibal replies, smoothing down his own shirt.

“Very well. I’ll go talk to Mason and ask him if this arrangement is…suitable to him and his sister.”

Hannibal nods his head, and Bedelia leaves the office, heels clicking along the hardwood floors. Excitement—something that usually only rears its head during a hunt or in Will’s presence—courses through Hannibal’s stomach. Though he has no desire in Margot Verger as a patient, her conversations will allow Hannibal greater insight into both her and Mason’s private lives, and Hannibal is always keen to obtain as much information about his enemies as possible (and as soon as Mason had expressed even the smallest interest in Will, that marked him as an enemy in Hannibal’s mind). His list of enemies was short and constantly changing, the names quickly removed as soon as they were added.

The rest of the day continues in the same monotonous fashion that Hannibal has come to expect from his time with Bedelia; each of the patients is interesting in their own right, with Bedelia expertly guiding the neurosis-riddled conversations with the skill of a snake charmer weaving a melody to guide a serpent from its lair. Still, none of his time at work could compare to the joy, the complete and utter satisfaction he got from spending time with Will, so it was always with a slight lilt in his step that Hannibal left Bedelia’s office each day at five.

On the way home, Hannibal felt his phone ring in his pocket—his private cell, not the one he used for work or other business. With a slight frown, Hannibal removes the phone from his pocket and quickly connects it to his car's bluetooth, surprised to see Chiyoh's number appearing on the car's screen.

"Chiyoh," Hannibal greets. "I am surprised to hear from you again so soon. Is everything well?"

"Your uncle has had a stroke," Chiyoh replies. Though her voice is steady, calm, there is a slight underpinning of panic behind each word, an entire cacophony of emotion contained in the transmission of those six simple words. "He refused to go to the hospital. Lady Murasaki called for a doctor, but they are…not optimistic about his recovery."

Hannibal, whose hands have tightened incrementally along the steering wheel with each additional word, forces himself to relax back into his seat lest he suffer his own stroke while driving. While he has no great love for his uncle, Robertus is his only remaining family, the only person on this godforsaken earth who shares blood with him, and the thought of losing that connection sends a chill up Hannibal's tense spine.

There are so many questions Hannibal wants to ask, but Chiyoh (unfortunately) does not have the medical knowledge to answer the majority of them, so Hannibal settles for, "Is he coherent? Can he speak or hear?"

"He can, though each word is painful for him. The doctor said he had a…" Chiyoh pauses, searching for the right term. "An ischemic stroke. He had a blockage in his internal carotid artery. He can't stand or walk without help, and his memory has also suffered."

Hannibal curses, planting his foot further onto the accelerator. "Ready the jet for me. I'll be there as soon as I can."

"Of course. Be careful, Hannibal. There is no need to injure yourself in your rush to get here. Your uncle will survive another night yet."

Hannibal laughs, but the sound is choked-off, bitter. "Is that a professional diagnosis, Chiyoh?" Still, he lifts his foot slightly from the gas pedal, allowing himself a more reasonable speed as he nears his home.

"Don't take that tone of voice with me, Hannibal. You know I can sense these things."

Hannibal nods his head, though he knows Chiyoh cannot see. Ever since they were children, Chiyoh has had an almost…unnatural ability to predict whether someone would die or not. Hannibal clearly remembers their old gardener who had a heart attack while working in the orchard, and when everyone else began planning for the funeral, Chiyoh shook her head, stubborn to the end that the man would live for a long while yet. As far as Hannibal knew, the man was still around and spending his retirement on some farm out in the French countryside.

"Very well. If you say Robertus will live through the night, I believe you."

“Good. How many rooms should we prepare? Are you bringing your…companion with you?”

Hannibal thinks of Will, of Will surrounded by his family (of his family becoming Will’s family, accepting the boy no less than he deserves to be loved) and finds his heart swelling with emotion. “Just one room. We will share.”

Chiyoh makes no comment on this, promising to relay his instructions both to the head of staff at his uncle’s expansive home and to the pilot in charge of the private plane kept stationed in Baltimore for Hannibal’s personal use.

As Hannibal finally pulls into the garage, his mind is already pulling into a thousand diverse directions, plans and lists and instructions forming as he prepares for this unexpected change in his schedule. Opening the garage door, he hears piano music in the distance, stilted and uncertain but still no less beautiful. Immediately, the stress he had collected from the phone call dissolves, landing in a puddle on the entryway rug. Hannibal walks into his office, enamored to find Will at the piano, head crouched over the keys, chocolate curls nearly brushing the gleaming ivories as Will focuses on the placement of each finger.

“That sounds lovely, darling,” Hannibal says, amused when Will jumps at the sudden noise.

“You’re home!” Will cries, standing from the bench and running toward Hannibal with open arms. His movements are slightly awkward, a waddle more than a run, and Hannibal realizes (with far too much relish) that Will is still sore from their love making last night, no doubt a soreness inside of him that he’s never experienced before.

“Darling,” Hannibal coos, lifting Will into his arms and drawing Will into a long, messy kiss. Will licks eagerly along Hannibal’s closed lips and Hannibal—ever obliging, ever willing to spoil each and every one of Will’s whims—opens his mouth in response. Will’s tongue dives inside with a moan from the boy, and he wraps his arms around Hannibal’s neck, his legs around Hannibal’s waist, until both of their bodies are completely connected, touching in nearly every way possible.

Will’s tongue expertly slips into Hannibal’s waiting mouth, licking along Hannibal’s teeth before eagerly twining with Hannibal’s own tongue, rubbing against him as if to taste Hannibal (and the thought of Will tasting Hannibal, *consuming* Hannibal is enough to have him letting out a low, thick groan). They kiss for a few more minutes, breathing heavily in the quiet room, the occasional wet smack of lips and saliva the only other sound. Eventually, though, Hannibal places his hand on the back of Will’s neck and physically pulls the boy from where he’s still licking inside of Hannibal’s mouth. Will pouts at the separation, lips red and shiny, a pretty flush high on his cheekbones, his blue eyes foggy with lust (with what Hannibal wishes were love).

“Hannibal…” Will whines, “I’ve missed you so much today.”

“And I, you. However, there is something important we must discuss, no matter how badly I want to keep kissing your lush mouth until we both become too exhausted to do anything else.” Hannibal, still holding his darling boy, walks over to his leather armchair and sits

down, bringing Will to rest in his lap. The boy first perfectly inside his embrace, straddling his muscular thighs, arms still wrapped around Hannibal's neck.

"What is it?" Will asks, still trying to steady his breathing, to shake the haze of lust from his brilliant blue eyes.

"My Uncle Robertus has suffered from a stroke." Hannibal pauses, then asks, "Do you know what that means?"

Will shakes his head, unruly curls softly glancing off of Hannibal's cheek, spreading the scent of Hannibal's own shampoo—Will still uses Hannibal's shampoo more often than not, despite Hannibal buying Will his own shampoo specifically made for curly hair. Hannibal tries (and fails) to be upset about this. If Will wants to smell like Hannibal, well, Hannibal has always been more possessive than others, and the smell of his own toiletries on Will is just one more claim to add to the litany of other ways in which he owns his boy.

"It means that there was a blockage in one of the arteries in his head and this caused his brain to become damaged. It usually occurs in those more advanced in age, and my uncle is not young. He will most likely die as a result of the stroke."

Will frowns, placing his hands on Hannibal's cheeks, one palm on each side. Hannibal luxuriates in the feel of Will's warm, soft palms caressing his skin, holding him in place, almost as if to prevent Hannibal from flying apart at the flurry of emotions and thoughts that tear at his brain like ravenous vultures.

"You are…attached to your uncle," Will says, peering into Hannibal's eyes with an almost unnerving intensity. Hannibal stares back, allowing the boy a glimpse into his mind, his emotions. He unzips his person suit a few inches and waits for the scorn. The disdain. The disgust at not being strong enough (man enough) to withstand the pressure of becoming the last remaining Lecter alive.

It never comes.

"You do not love him," Will whispers. His voice blows across Hannibal's sensitive lips, cool and firm. "But he is your only blood relative left, isn't he? Oh, Hannibal." Will's own eyes fill with tears, the worry and abandonment Hannibal has tried to keep inside revealing itself in the vessel of Will's endless empathy. Will coos at him, stroking his cheeks with soft, sure touches. "You can hurt. You don't always have to be strong. I'm here, Hannibal. I'm here."

Hannibal feels a prickle of moisture in his eyes, and he quickly blinks it away, heart ballooning with each gentle touch, each hushed word given from Will's mouth like a gift. He leans his forehead forward and connects it with Will's so that the two of them are pressed together. Will's hair brushes his skin, tickling, and Hannibal shifts his head to swipe away the errant curl, tucking it nearly behind one of Will's tiny ears. He grips Will's hips harder, bringing the boy closer, wanting more even now. Will allows the (none-too-gentle) touch, tightening his own arms around Hannibal's neck and allowing the man as much time (as much love) as he needs.

“Thank you,” Hannibal chokes out, his lips only a few millimeters from Will’s. He leans down and presses their mouths together, a low, dry brush that sends a fire of love and desire blazing up his spine. “I don’t know what I have done to deserve you, Mylimasis, but once I find out, I will do it again and again to keep you here with me.”

Will giggles, the sound light, tinkling, (angelic), and Hannibal’s heart soars. “You don’t have to do anything, Hannibal. I’m here, whether you do things for me or not. The only way I’m leaving is if you send me away. And you’re not going to do that, are you?”

“No,” Hannibal whispers. “Never. I…I…”

“I know,” Will whispers, a single tear escaping his glittering gemstone eyes, a drop-shaped pearl that travels from the corner of his eye down, down, until it lands at the edge of his chin. Hannibal can’t himself from leaning forward and licking up the salty tear as if it were manna from heaven.

Hannibal forces himself to lean back, to look into Will’s eyes when he says, “I must tell you anyway. I love you, Will. As much as any man has ever loved another. As much as the tide loves the moon or a falcon loves the feel of air beneath its wings. You nourish my soul and give me infinite happiness. If I could spend each of my days holding you in my arms and doing nothing else, I would be content.”

With each sentence, each word, the glistening in Will’s eyes only grows more blinding until the tears spill out all at once, each leaving a shining wet path down Will’s lovely face.

“I love you too,” Will chokes out. “And I’m not good with words like you are. I can’t write you a poem or carve out my love for you on some poor idiot’s chest. But I love you, Hannibal. Even if you can’t give me anything, even if all you have are your arms to hold me, I would be so happy.”

They both choke out a cry then, two fools in love. Hannibal brings Will closer—always closer, Will can never be close enough, even if the boy burrowed underneath Hannibal’s skin it still wouldn’t be *close enough*—and slides a hand through Will’s curls, bringing the boy’s face to his neck. They sit like that, entwined, in love, complete and whole for the first time in either of their lives, and the world seems to settle as if a broken shell had finally rolled through the ocean enough times to find its missing half and the two pieces were now slotted into place, never to be separated again.

Will’s hiccuping cries slow down as Hannibal continues to stroke the boy’s soft hair, the nape of his neck, his sloping back. Hannibal memorizes the scent of Will’s tears as they mix with the smell of his happiness (his *love*). Hannibal sprays the inner sanctum of his Mind Palace with the scent. The chapel, the hallowed walls, the intricately tiled floor. All of it is imbued until each heavy inhale is filled with the intoxicating scent, never to be removed.

“Darling,” Hannibal eventually whispers. “We must pack. I am afraid there is a plane waiting to take us to France, and though it pains me to say, I cannot hold you and prepare for our trip at the same time.”

Will sniffs, bringing his beautiful face out of the curve of Hannibal's neck and in front of Hannibal's eyes. His own eyes are red-rimmed and puffy, still shedding a few tears, and Hannibal leans down to gently kiss each of Will's eyelids, his lips tasting of salt when he forces himself to pull away.

"Okay, fine. But you have to hold me later, once we're done packing."

"Of course, Mylimasis. As long as you wish."

Will scrunches up his nose. "I wish that you could keep holding me now." He sighs, a long, shuddering exhale of breath. "It's your own fault I'm so spoiled."

"Perfect, you mean," Hannibal replies, placing one last, delicate kiss on the tip of Will's adorable nose. "Come, I'll help you pick which items to bring." Hannibal (slowly, unwillingly) lifts Will off of his lap and sets him onto the Persian rug, smiling as Will once again winces due to his soreness.

For the first time in months, Hannibal goes upstairs to his attic, fetching his suitcase as well as an additional bag for Will's items. Hannibal curses himself for not buying Will his own luggage set already, but that could be remedied easily enough once they reached France.

Back in their bedroom, Will is sitting on the bed, a perplexed look on his face.

"We're going on a plane," he says, watching as Hannibal opens each suitcase and places them on the ground.

"Yes," Hannibal replies, reaching into his nightstand to grab his and Will's passports. "My family owns several private jets, one of which is stationed in Baltimore. As soon as we arrive, the plane will leave."

Will's face goes white, not unlike that of a drained corpse, and Hannibal frowns.

"I've never been on a plane," Will says. "I…think I might be afraid of heights."

Hannibal stands from where he is kneeling over his suitcase and sits beside Will on the bed. He takes one of Will's hands into his own, noting how cold it is, likely due to the boy's quickly spiraling anxiety. "Darling, if you wish, I can give you a light sedative for the flight. Or," and here, Hannibal lets a sultry tone take over his accent, "I can think of a few other ways to keep your mind occupied while we are in the air."

Will flushes scarlet, arousal immediately blooming over the fear and anxiety in his scent. "O…okay," he says. "I trust you." His voice trembles the slightest amount, and Hannibal fears if he has any more love inside of his heart for this boy he might burst.

"What a good boy I have," Hannibal murmurs, leaning down to place a soft kiss along Will's blazing cheek. "Why don't you go pick out three of your favorite shirts to bring."

Will nods his head, hopping up from the bed to run to the closet. Hannibal smiles, shakes his head, and finishes packing his own bag. It only takes about thirty minutes for both suitcases to be filled, toiletries and all, and Hannibal easily lifts both bags into the air, carrying them

down the staircase with smooth, graceful movements. He quickly checks the fridge and countertops, noting any items that might spoil while they are away, and brings those out to the garbage can on his driveway just in case they are detained for longer than planned.

“How long will we be gone?” Will asks, running his fingertips over the silky material of his favorite blue coat.

“I am not sure, Mylimasis. It could be a day. It could be a week. It is entirely dependent on my uncle’s health and if he wishes to have company. Either way, you will be with me the entire time.”

Will relaxes the slightest amount, and Hannibal wants to melt, to mold himself against Will’s form until there is no way to tell where one ends and the other begins. Instead, he presses yet another kiss against Will’s cheek and carries the suitcases to the car, shooting off a text to Bedelia explaining the situation. She responds back quickly, thanking him for the notice and wishing him luck in attending to his uncle.

With no other tasks to attend to, Hannibal pulls out of the garage and begins driving his Bentley toward the private airstrip on the other side of town. Though he is saddened by his uncle’s condition, the sight of Will (who *loves* him, despite knowing what he does, what he eats, what he is) sitting next to him in the car is enough to warm him the entire drive there.

Will is…nervous, to say the least. He never considered himself afraid of heights, but he’s also never been very high up. In fact, the only time he’s ever been in something taller than a three-story building is when Hannibal took him to his friend’s restaurant the other day, and it was dark by the time they reached the top floor so Will couldn’t see anything out the windows. Now, though…

“Relax, darling,” Hannibal murmurs into his ear. The older man places his warm, broad palm on Will’s lower back, guiding him up the ramp that leads into the airplane. Hannibal’s airplane. Will didn’t even know people could own a plane, let alone *several*.

“Easy for you to say,” Will mutters, knowing he’s acting like a petulant child and unable to stop. “You own this plane. You’ve probably been inside more planes than I’ve been in cars.”

“Perhaps,” Hannibal replies, leading Will down a metal hallway and into a surprisingly spacious room. The outside of the plane had seemed slender, but the room they stood in was as wide as Hannibal’s dining room and three times as long. There were curved, white leather couches on either side of the room, and above each couch a row of square windows. Three glass tables sat in-between the couches. At the far end of the room, a bed sat in the middle of the floor with a thick, golden curtain tucked to the side. The curtain could be pulled across the room to separate the bed from the rest of the space. Will blushes at the sight of the bed, remembering Hannibal’s…promise to keep him occupied during the flight.

Besides him and Hannibal, there were only two other people on the plane: the pilot, a woman with brilliant red hair that Will thought looked way too young to be flying a plane, and a flight attendant who provided a chilled bottle of champagne to Hannibal and a chilled bottle of sparkling water to Will before disappearing to who-knows-where.

“Sit,” Hannibal tells him, guiding him to one of the plush leather couches. Will sits, still half-believing he’s in some sort of dream. There is no way he is sitting next to Hannibal (who told Will he *loves* him, the first time in Will’s life that word has ever been said, and Will plans to hoard the memory like a dragon guarding its finest treasure) on a private jet, about to travel to another country to meet the uncle of the man who kidnapped him after killing (and later eating) his father. The man he is so in love with that it sometimes hurts, a sharp, searing pain in his heart that is the best pleasure-pain of all.

There is a humming sound, then a vibration that travels down the length of the plane.

“That is the engine turning on,” Hannibal tells him, soothing, running a hand up and down Will’s spine as if he were a frightened dog hiding from a thunderstorm. Honestly, with the way Will is shivering inside of his coat, the similarities are not lost on him.

A sudden lurch.

“We are moving down the tarmac.”

Will shakes faster. Sweat beads on his forehead, and for a moment he fears he will be sick. And what a shame that would be, to ruin the thick, white carpet on Hannibal’s plane. Will has no idea how much a plane costs, but he doubts it would be cheap to replace the carpet on a jet like this.

There is a swooping sensation in Will’s stomach; it reminds him of the time he fell out of a high branch in a tree (he was trying to rescue a stuck kitten and ended up breaking one of his ribs and giving himself a concussion instead. The kitten remained stuck, and Will has never forgiven himself for that). “We are in the air now.” Hannibal takes off his own coat, body completely at ease, and lays it over the top of the couch. Outside, the world is black, and Will feels as though they are flying into a void.

One last rumble.

“That would be the landing gear retracting. Unless we hit an unexpected patch of turbulence, there should not be any more shaking until we land in France.”

Hannibal glances at Will, notes the no-doubt sickly shade of green in his face, and pulls Will into his lap.

“Hush, darling. Would you like me to sing to you?”

Will hisses, shaking his head. “I’m not a baby.”

“No, you are not. The offer still stands.”

Will thinks about it for a moment, then shakes his head again, this time with less vigor. “No. Thank you.” Will bites on his bottom lip, drawing blood. He sucks on the open wound for a moment before asking, “Could you distract me some other way?”

Because Will is perched in Hannibal’s lap, he can feel the shiver that runs through the man, the way it causes everything from his torso to his thick, muscular thighs to tremble for a

moment. It's a delicious sensation, and the nausea in Will's stomach is quickly replaced by arousal.

"Of course, Mylimasis."

Now it's Will's turn to shiver, the sound of Hannibal's low, husky voice causing his skin to break out in goosebumps. Effortlessly, Hannibal lifts Will from the couch. Will has grown used to this—to Hannibal displaying his strength, his possessiveness, his absolute adoration of Will—and Will leans into the touch, simmering with arousal as Hannibal carries him over to the bed. He sets Will on the golden covers (ridiculously gaudy, just like the rest of the interior of this damn plane) and then closes the golden curtain behind him.

With the curtain closed, Will almost feels as though he's staying inside of some grand hotel. There's nightstands on either side of the large bed, a rug underneath it, and even some potted plants on neat, golden shelves to the right. If not for the gentle swooping that appears in his stomach each time the plane tilts to the right or left, or the smell of stale, recycled air, Will might forget he is on a plane at all.

Which is exactly the point.

"You look delectable," Hannibal growls, tugging at the tie around his neck in a way that is unfairly hot. Will lifts his hips up and slides off his coat, chucking it to the floor without care. Hannibal doesn't comment on this action, though his unimpressed look is enough to send Will spiraling into a fit of giggles. Of *course* Hannibal still cares about clothing on the floor, even when they are thousands of feet in the air.

"You look *far* too clothed," Will retorts, removing his socks and shoes in record time.

"Well, allow me to rectify my mistake," Hannibal says, voice smooth as sin. He takes off his suit one piece at a time, folding each item of clothing with care and more than a little pettiness. He specifically makes sure Will is looking as he sets the folded clothing on an armchair tucked into the corner of their "room" as if Will isn't already very aware that Hannibal wants him to do the same with his own clothing.

Subtly has never been Hannibal's strong suit.

With an eye roll and a huff of breath, Will takes off his shirt and pants, once more throwing them to the ground. Though he is much more distracted now, he is still conscious of how high they are in the air, and the thought makes his stomach swoop and his legs tremble. He isn't sure he could muster up enough strength to make it off the bed and over to the chair to put his clothing on it. He sure doesn't care enough to try.

By the time Will removes his boxers, Hannibal is over his moment of pettiness, eyes completely glued to Will's naked body. It's so flattering to have the attention (the love) of someone like Hannibal. Will basks in Hannibal's gaze, lazily stretching his body over the golden covers, toes flexed and pointing to Hannibal's boxers.

"You're still wearing clothes," Will pouts.

Hannibal takes off his boxers as if they are on fire, barely folding them before throwing them onto the chair and kneeling over Will on the bed. The mattress sinks under their combined weight, and Will grips onto Hannibal's thick, hairy thighs to stabilize his stomach, anxiety rushing back in an instant. He can picture it so easily in his mind: their weight too much for the mattress to handle, a hole opening up in the bed (in the bottom of the plane), a drop of thousands of feet before they hit the ground with a resounding—

"Will," Hannibal murmurs, grabbing his shaking chin. "Darling, look at me."

Will forces his eyes to focus, to forget the horrifying thought his overactive imagination had conjured up.

"There you are. My brave, brilliant boy. Focus on me, darling." Hannibal slowly, deliberately leans down over Will's splayed torso. His bright red tongue flicks out, latching onto Will's right nipple.

All of the breath leaves Will's body.

Hannibal has not touched Will's nipples much since their first night together, and Will's body aches at the memory, desperate to feel that same, burning pleasure as he had before.

"Please," Will begs, arching his chest further into Hannibal's mouth. "Please, suck on them."

Hannibal groans, the sound vibrating into Will's nipple and stimulating it further. With a wet sucking sound, Hannibal latches onto the bud and *pulls*, drawing the red nub completely into his mouth and sucking on it hard. Will keens, hips thrusting off the bed, puffing out his chest even more. Hannibal's mouth is wet and tight and obscenely hot. When he grazes his teeth over the delicate skin, Will swears he sees god, bright lights dancing behind his eyes at the delicious pleasure-pain.

"Again," he whines, tugging Hannibal's hair to draw him even closer, though there is no space remaining between Hannibal's mouth and his writhing body.

Hannibal obliges, teasing his teeth along Will's nipple. He grasps the nub in-between his teeth and tugs on it, pulling it away from Will's body before releasing the tender flesh. Will cries out, voice echoing off the metallic walls, and he is too far gone to care, to feel embarrassment, to feel anything than the pure ecstasy of Hannibal's mouth on his body.

Hannibal sucks on it again before finally releasing Will's nipple. The skin is puffy and swollen, and when Hannibal blows on the overworked flesh, it sends an icy shard of arousal straight to Will's desperate erection. Hannibal eyes Will, head still bent down, and leans over to Will's other, neglected nipple. He sucks the untouched nub into his warm, wet mouth, and Will moans again, amazed at how such a simple touch can cause such pleasure to spread like fire across his body.

"Your teeth," Will whimpers, tugging once more on Hannibal's thoroughly mussed hair. "Use your teeth again."

Hannibal pops Will's nipple out of his mouth, releasing it with a wet squelching sound that burns Will's ears and makes him squirm.

"You want my teeth, darling? Do you like it when it hurts?"

"Yes!" Will cries. "Please, hurt me more."

With an inhuman growl, Hannibal bends down and tugs Will's nipple once more into his mouth. He sucks on it, swirling the red nub across his tongue as if to taste each inch of skin.

And then he bites down. Hard.

Will throws his head back, screaming at the magnificent pleasure-pain. It hurts so bad. It feels so good. Will arches his spine and silently begs Hannibal for more, so overcome from the sensation he can't speak, can't whine, can't do anything but offer his body and hope that Hannibal accepts.

Hannibal bites down again, even harder this time, and when Will is able to raise his head to look down, he sees his own blood leaking from the bite mark on his nipple. The blood has smeared across the pale skin of his chest, red on white.

It covers Hannibal's lips.

Will's cock throbs, a drop of precum spilling from the head and rolling down the sensitive skin.

"I must be inside you," Hannibal says. His voice is thick as molasses, and the blood on his lips shines with each spoken syllable.

"Yes," Will says, uncaring of how it happens. Hannibal's own arousal (his love), swirls inside of his maroon eyes and mixes with Will's own arousal (his own love), doubling the intensity of each look, each touch, each taste. Will licks his lips and stares at Hannibal, waiting to see what the man will do.

Hannibal leans forward and kisses Will, sharing Will's blood so that both of them end up with slick, red lips. Hannibal pulls back far too soon, placing his hands beneath Will's armpits and quickly flipping their positions so that Hannibal is on his back and Will is lying on top. Will takes the opportunity to pet Hannibal's chest hair, enamored with how the thick, curly hair feels against his palms. Hannibal watches him for a moment, amused, before tapping his bottom once.

"Up here." Hannibal says.

"What do you mean?" Will asks, fingers still running through Hannibal's chest hair, unable to stop moving, stop tugging.

Hannibal tilts his head for a moment before saying, "I want you to sit on my face."

Will's brain stops working. "You want me to…" Though there is no one else in the room with them, Will can't help but glance around, suddenly sure that the flight attendant will appear

out of nowhere to scold them for their behavior. Will feels his face grow hot as he imagines someone walking in while he is sitting on Hannibal's face. "But…you… *why*?"

"As I said," Hannibal says, voice far too calm in Will's opinion for the conversation. "I wish to be inside you, Mylimasis. You will have complete control over your own pleasure in this position."

Will shudders, considering. They have already done so much together. Why would this position be any more inappropriate (or intimate) than the others?

"Okay." Will isn't proud of how his voice squeaks, but he ignores it, rising to his knees and shuffling his body up, up until his ass is directly over Hannibal's waiting mouth (a mouth that is stained with Will's blood, and the sight of that sends a fresh wave of desire coursing through Will's body).

Will begins to bend down, then hesitates once more. "I'm too heavy now. I've gained some more weight this past month, what if you can't breathe? What if—"

Will doesn't get to finish his sentence. With firm, steady hands, Hannibal grabs Will's pale thighs and *shoves* him down onto Hannibal's tongue. It sinks into his hole with a firm, wet push, writhing inside of Will as if to taste every inch of his hole.

"*Hannibal*," Will cries, so turned on it physically hurts. Hannibal's tongue is so hot, burning where it enters Will's body. It soothes the slight soreness from Hannibal being inside of Will last night. Because Will is sitting down on it, his weight only presses it harder, deeper inside of him, until it feels like Hannibal is licking into his very core, touching him so deep inside that Will will never be able to move without feeling the imprint of Hannibal's tongue inside of his body.

The sounds Hannibal makes are obscene, slurps that echo off the walls and wet licks that turn Will into a shivering, trembling mess. He begins to rock his hips, stuffed full of Hannibal's tongue and *still* wanting more. Hannibal only encourages him, grabbing harder on Will's thighs and pushing the boy down further, further until Hannibal's tongue licks up against his prostate. It stabs at the swollen, tender bud, and Will chokes out Hannibal's name, burning from the inside out. He rocks his hips with abandon, all embarrassment forgotten in the face of such overwhelming pleasure.

From behind him, Will can hear a new sound, something slick and fast. He turns his head and looks over his shoulder.

He sees Hannibal furiously tugging on his own red, throbbing erection, his large hand a blur over the delicate flesh. It's this (the sight of Hannibal so aroused by eating out Will he can't help but touch himself) that sends Will tumbling over the edge. And what a steep cliff it is; Will feels like he's falling into his orgasm for hours, shooting cum all over the gaudy golden headboard in ropes of white that seem to spurt from his cock in ungodly amounts. Below him, Hannibal groans, no doubt feeling the incessant clench of Will's hole as he rides out his pleasure. Hannibal's body trembles and then he too is coming, the sound of his hand even wetter as it strokes his erection a few final times.

Will (whose entire weight is now resting on Hannibal's face, unable to be held up anymore by his shaking knees) eventually leans over, laying next to Hannibal so that he is facing the older man. Hannibal's mouth is bright red and shiny, Will's fluids mixed with the copious amounts of saliva Hannibal produced while eating Will out. Without a second thought, Will leans over and kisses Hannibal, still floating on the waves of lingering pleasure from his orgasm. Hannibal kisses Will back with fervor even though his tongue must be sore from fucking Will with it so thoroughly.

"Thank you," Will gasps once he finally pulls back for air. "I think that was the hardest I've ever come in my life."

Hannibal smirks, looking entirely too smug for someone who has saliva dripping down their chin (and still managing to look beautiful regardless). "It was my pleasure, darling. Would you like a shower?"

Will frowns. Though he had forgotten for at least a brief moment that they were on a plane, he definitely remembers now, and he can't believe that there's a shower hiding somewhere inside of the narrow metal tube.

"This way," Hannibal says, amused. He leans down and scoops Will into his arms (and if this habit of Hannibal constantly carrying him everywhere continues, Will's feet might never touch the ground again. He finds he doesn't mind the thought) before taking him out of their "bedroom" and through a metal door.

Inside, there's a brilliantly decorated bathroom full of golden tiles, an ornate shower and tub, and even a row of glass vases that look like they might shatter if a droplet of water landed too hard on the thin surface.

Hannibal carries Will into the shower and sets him down on his feet before turning on the water and testing it until he deems it warm enough to touch Will's skin. It's this simple act (making sure the water isn't too hot or cold) that sends a kaleidoscope of butterflies tumbling through Will's abdomen, wings beating against his stomach until his whole body is shaking, trembling with the force of his love.

"Hannibal," he whispers, pulling the man close to him so that their water-slicked skin is touching. "I love you so much."

Hannibal melts against him, wrapping his broad arms around Will's torso and pulling him impossibly closer. They stand like that, two turned to one, until the water begins to cool despite Hannibal's careful maneuvering of the faucet, and they are forced to clean themselves before it turns totally to ice.

By the time they are dry and back into their clothing, Will finds himself falling asleep on his feet, and Hannibal takes him to the bed, tucking him in (and surreptitiously wiping the stain of Will's seed off the headboard) before sliding in next to him and humming a sweet tune that sends Will falling into sleep.

When he wakes, it's to the jarring rumble of the landing gear being released. Will blinks into the dim light of the cabin and rubs at his tired eyes, unsurprised that Hannibal is awake and

sitting in the armchair next to the bed.

“Almost there, Mylimasis,” Hannibal says. His voice is warm and gentle, and Will feels the warmth of it sink into his skin, his bones, spreading heat throughout his body until he wants to fall right back to sleep.

“Are you nervous?” Will asks.

Hannibal purses his lips and puts away the tablet he had been reading on. “No. I do not get nervous. However, I will admit to being concerned. I hope Chiyoh has exaggerated the extent of my uncle’s condition, though I doubt that is the case.”

Will sits up and yawns, stretching out on the mattress just as the airplane swoops to the left, nearly sending Will tumbling to the ground. The sudden movement chafes his shirt against his tender, swollen nipples. He grumbles and stands, walking on wobbly legs over to Hannibal and plopping himself down into the man’s open lap. “Who is Chiyoh?”

“She is my aunt’s handmaiden. She was one of my first, and only, childhood friends. I hold her in the highest regards. I hope you will, too.”

Will gulps, suddenly nervous about meeting such important people in Hannibal’s life (perhaps the only important people to the older man). “And your aunt? Do you get along with her?”

“I do.”

Hannibal says nothing more, and Will doesn’t prod further, sensing that now was not the time.

The plane lands—and Will breathes out a sigh of relief that he has been holding for the past seven hours—and Hannibal and Will disembark with ease, the flight attendant trailing behind with their luggage.

Outside, it is early in the morning, perhaps eight or nine, and the sun is far too bright on Will’s still-adjusting eyes. The plane has pulled onto a narrow strip of asphalt that is surrounded on both sides by dozens of similar roads and, in the distance, a bustling town. Also on their strip of asphalt is a black car (far more expensive than it probably needs to be, Will notices with an eye roll) and a young woman with shiny black hair, piercing brown eyes, and a posture that would put a sergeant to shame.

“Hannibal,” she greets, nodding her head. Her voice is controlled, level, but Will can sense the relief echoing in the undertones.

“Chiyoh,” he responds, tilting his head.

Chiyoh’s eyes move from Hannibal to Will, and Will feels like a bug pinned on a corkboard, unable to move, to do anything but wait as his entire being is scrutinized with an unnerving gaze. “And you must be Will,” she says.

“I am,” he responds.

"*Est-ce que tu parles français*?"

"*Un peu*," Will says, feeling as though he is being tested, though for what he cannot tell.

"Wonderful. Then you can keep up at the estate," Chiyoh says. Her posture is no less stiff than before, but there's a softness in her eyes that tells Will he passed her test, whatever it was.

They walk to the car, and once inside, Will rubs his hands over the buttery leather of the seats, breathing in the scent of expensive perfume and polished wood. Hannibal sits in the back of the car with him rather than taking the passenger seat, and Will blushes, secretly pleased to not be left alone. He has no idea how Hannibal will act around his family, and even though Hannibal has now confessed his love to Will, that doesn't mean Will won't be forgotten as soon as they reach his uncle's estate.

Hannibal and Chiyoh discuss Robertus's health the entire drive to the estate, Chiyoh occasionally glancing back through the rearview mirror and making eye-contact with Will. He always looks away, no more comfortable looking into her eyes than any others; Hannibal, of course, being the only exception to Will's strict rule against eye contact.

The scenery is stunning; once they leave the bustling airport and city behind, the car becomes surrounded on all sides by rolling, snow-covered fields and bare trees that are dusted with frost. Will leans against Hannibal's side, content to stare as they make the relatively short trip from the airstrip to Hannibal's uncle's home.

"There," Hannibal murmurs into Will's ear after an hour or so of driving. "Can you see it, Mylimasis?"

Will shivers at the feel of Hannibal's breath on his ear and looks toward where Hannibal is pointing. There, in the distance, is a looming mansion—no, a *castle* . It dominates the flat fields surrounding the estate, its walls made of muted red brick that are topped with gray slate spires that seem to poke into the heavens. Dozens (if not hundreds) of white-framed windows line each long wall. Will can't look away, breath fogging the chilled glass as he stays pressed against the window.

"It's beautiful," he says, unashamed at the naked awe in his voice. "And your uncle *lives* there? Not just visits during the summer or takes pictures in front of it for his friends before leaving to some normal apartment somewhere else?"

Hannibal huffs out an amused laugh and even Chiyoh chuckles. "No, darling, he lives there full-time. He inherited the estate when my parents passed away. I suppose now is as good a time as any to tell you that I am a count, and when my uncle dies, this estate will pass to me."

Will goes pale. He doesn't know much about nobility (okay, he knows nothing) but a count? That sounds…far too refined for someone who *loves* him. "Oh."

"Breathe, darling. It's simply a title, nothing more."

"Right," Will chokes out. "Count Lecter. Nothing important."

“Actually,” Chiyoh says from the front seat, “You should refer to him as Count Doctor Lecter the Eighth if you truly wish to use his correct title.”

Will pales further, and Hannibal makes a soothing sound, drawing Will into his arms so that Will is practically sprawled in the man’s lap. Will frowns and makes a token noise of protest (but who is he kidding—he loves being in Hannibal’s arms, audience be damned).

They pull into the circular gravel drive in front of the estate, and before Will can blink, an army of (servants? Do people have those still?) emerge from the castle and begin to unload the car, one of them opening Hannibal’s door and helping him out with a glove-covered hand. Will is escorted next, and he grabs the man’s hand as gently as possible, not wanting to do something rude or unseemly before they have even made it inside.

“Thanks,” Will tells the man, and the man smiles down at him.

“Your uncle is in his room,” Chiyoh calls over her shoulder, not waiting to see if they are following before walking into the front door. Hannibal puts a comforting hand on Will’s back and pushes him up the front steps and into the foyer.

Will is…stunned. He cannot believe that someone *lives* here. And not just someone; Hannibal’s uncle, the man who helped raise him, the man who will leave this building (and who knows how many countless others) to Hannibal once he passes away.

The foyer is long, stretching from the front of the house to the back, with two grand staircases splitting off on either side that lead to the second level. The hardwood floors are almost all covered by muted red-and-blue floral rugs, no doubt handwoven from some exotic location that Will has never heard of. Across the room, at the back of the house, large windows open up to show the grounds behind the estate. Will can see trimmed hedges and brilliant fountains that stretch as far as the horizon. Even the furniture inside is exquisite, with intricately carved wooden tables lining the floor and golden-framed paintings that were probably as old as the castle lining the walls.

Will trembles, weighed down by the sheer *opulence* around him, remembering that up until two months ago his home consisted of a piece of sheet metal he had scrounged from the dumpster and a pile of old fabric he used as a pillow. To go from that to even breathing in a room like this is…dizzying. Will presses against Hannibal’s hand, silently begging the man to take charge (to make sure Will doesn’t pass out in front of his aunt and uncle) and Hannibal runs his hand soothingly over Will’s spine, encouraging him to walk up the staircase to their left.

“You are doing so good, my love,” Hannibal coos into his ear, helping him up the stairs, one step at a time. “I am so proud of how far you’ve come. There have been so many new things I have asked you to try these past few days, and you have exceeded my expectations at each and every turn. I know how scared you must feel, riding on a plane across the sea and then meeting my family all at once. Just know that no matter what happens, I *love* you. That will never change.”

Will doesn’t realize he is crying until Hannibal wipes one of his tears away, broad thumb stroking away the moisture before bringing it to his lips and licking it away. Hannibal licks

his lips after as if chasing the taste of Will's tears, and Will lets out a weak groan, scared and nervous and aroused and so in love it hurts.

They eventually make it up the (seemingly endless) staircase before walking down a hallway that is equally as opulent as the foyer downstairs. Hannibal stops at the last doorway, raising a fist and knocking once, twice, before waiting. Will hears a low *come in* from the other side of the door, and his body is once more trembling, unable to stop the rush of worries that burst from his mind like a broken dam. They flow from his head and pour through every part of his body until he feels waterlogged, weighed down from the stress and anxiety.

Hannibal leans down and brushes a featherlight kiss against his forehead.

And just like that, Will forces his worries back into a hidden corner of his mind. Hannibal is here. Hannibal loves him. Hannibal would do anything for him.

Will is not a disappointment, and no matter what he does or says, Hannibal will love him.

With a shaky nod, Will reaches out himself to turn the doorknob, pushing open the door and stepping inside. He is greeted by Chiyoh, a beautiful woman standing beside Chiyoh who must be Hannibal's aunt, and an older man lying on a bed. The man has dark, graying hair, a stubble-covered beard, and the same piercing, maroon eyes Will has come to love so much.

"Hello, Uncle Robertus," Hannibal greets from behind Will. His voice is as silky smooth as ever, and Will expects that not a hair is out of place on the man's head despite their journey to get here.

"Hannibal. Come in. And bring your boy."

Will swallows and walks further into the room. The sounds of his footsteps are muted on the thick rug, and he forces himself to walk until he is only a few feet from the bed. Hannibal is behind him, a solid presence that gives him the courage to raise his eyes and look at Robertus directly.

"Hello," the man greets. His voice is slightly slurred, and there's a paleness to his face that doesn't match the rest of his olive-toned skin. "You must be William."

"I am," Will says, voice hushed in the large room. "I am glad I am able to meet you."

"Before I die, you mean?" Robertus says, coughing into a large fist.

Hannibal's aunt makes a noise high in the back of her throat and comes to stand next to the bed, a glass of water in her hand. She forces Robertus to take a long sip, shooting a disapproving look at Will, before walking back to stand beside Chiyoh.

Will feels his shoulders slump, and he shoves his hands into his pockets, not sure what he has done wrong, but surely it must have been something bad if Hannibal's aunt already disapproves of him. He takes a small, half-step away from the bed, wishing he could turn and run all the way back to the plane. Hannibal remains at his side however, and so Will forces himself to stay.

“You are better than I had hoped,” Hannibal replies, ever ready with a smooth reply. “What does the doctor think?”

“That old hack?” Robertus coughs once more, cheeks turning a flaming red, and Hannibal’s aunt once again appears with the cup of water. Robertus waves his hand and sends her away. “He tells me that he wants me in the hospital hooked up to some machine. As if I am going to let them stick me with a needle and fill my body with chemicals. No, I’ll stay here and die a natural death like god intended.”

Though Will isn’t facing Hannibal, he can *feel* the man roll his eyes.

“No need to be so dramatic, uncle. I am sure the doctor means well. I would, however, like to run a few tests of my own if that is possible.”

“I expected no less. Is that not why we sent you to medical school in the first place? So I wouldn’t have to call on a stranger to take care of me?”

Will is certain that no one sent Hannibal anywhere—the man is far too stubborn, and the only way he went to medical school is if he sent himself—but Will wisely keeps this thought to himself.

“Chiyoh, why don’t you show Will to the room we will be staying in. I’m afraid these tests may take quite some time, and I am sure he is fatigued after our journey.”

Will wants to protest (to stay by Hannibal’s side no matter what) but Hannibal is right; even though Will slept almost the entire plane ride, he still feels tired. Will sighs, squeezes Hannibal’s hand and gives him a timid smile, and then follows Chiyoh out of the bedroom door. When he is standing in the door frame, he hazards a glance back into the bedroom, wanting to see Hannibal’s tall, strong figure once more before heading into the unknown.

What he sees is Lady Murasaki glaring at him, a small frown marring her otherwise perfect features.

Will shudders, turns, and wishes he hadn’t looked back at all. He is not sure why Lady Murasaki is so displeased with him, and quite honestly, he isn’t sure he wants to find out. Instead, he decides to do what he always does when confronted with a new problem: he decides to ignore it.

Šeima

Chapter Summary

Hannibal and Will continue their stay in France.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

With quick, practiced movements, Hannibal conducts a thorough examination of his uncle's physical health. When the examination is over, it is just as Hannibal suspected; his uncle's stroke has left him partially paralyzed, and because the blockage occurred near his brain stem, he is at a high risk of experiencing another. Hannibal is saddened by his findings. It is as Will—his brilliant boy, who so cleverly sees what others cannot—had said yesterday; though Hannibal has no love or affection for his uncle, Robertus is Hannibal's last remaining blood on this earth, and the thought of losing that connection is unpleasant to Hannibal.

"What did you find, Hannibal?" Robertus asks, coughing once more into his fist. Lady Murasaki stands silently behind them both, not uttering a word. She is still, save when she moves to fetch Robertus a handkerchief or glass of water, fluttering to the man's side like a hummingbird before quickly slinking back into the shadows of the dimly lit room.

"You are not well," Hannibal responds, having no qualms about being blunt. Now is not the time. "The stroke has severely damaged your cerebellum, which accounts for your inability to walk. I'm afraid your brain stem was also affected by the blockage of your artery, and the prognosis for such damage is…underwhelming."

Robertus laughs, low and raspy, and then coughs once more. "Never one to mince words, were you. I suppose I should be grateful for that. That doctor Chiyoh hired thinks that by using medical jargon, I'll be more comfortable with my impending death."

Hannibal raises a brow and goes to wash his hands in a nearby basin of water. "I said nothing about death."

"You didn't need to. I can feel my body well enough despite the paralysis. I am not much longer for this world."

Hannibal sighs and rolls his shoulders, coming to stand once more by his uncle's side. As he stares into the man's eyes, it is strange to gaze upon the same shade of maroon he sees in the mirror reflected back to him. Those eyes which plucked him from that far-away, dirty (lonely) orphanage and brought him into a life of luxury, those eyes which raised him when Hannibal was left with no one but himself. It will be strange to not see those eyes once his uncle has passed.

“Is there anything I can do to ease your suffering?”

Robertus shakes his head. Coughs. When he lowers the white handkerchief from his mouth, there are blood splatters marring the otherwise pristine fabric, ribbons of scarlet that Robertus quickly hides by scrunching the soiled square into the meaty flesh of his fist. “It won’t be long now. Just leave me in peace.”

“As you wish. I’ll check on you again this evening.” Hannibal turns, ignoring Lady Murasaki’s lingering eyes, and walks out of the bedroom.

In the hall, Chiyoh and Will are nowhere to be seen. Hannibal walks toward the staircase and stops outside the door to his old bedroom. He supposes that this is the room he and Will have been given for the duration of their stay, though he can’t hear any sound coming from inside. He slowly turns the gilded doorknob and pushes the door open, eyes wandering over old, familiar walls.

It’s as though time has stood still for the past decade, ten years passing without a single item changing in his room, nothing shifting an inch. The thin, burgundy duvet is still folded neatly over the corners of his bed, a few matching pillows sitting on top. The walls are covered in the carved wood paneling and rose wallpaper he had abhorred so much as a teenager. Even his old encyclopedias remain sitting on the bookshelf beside the window, each volume much-used and well-loved, spines only held together by worn leather and prayers.

And sitting amidst all these memories is his lovely Will, a picture of beauty in front of the window, face illuminated by the wan midday sun shining through the clear glass panes. Hannibal itches for his sketchbook, a single sheet of paper, something with which to capture the elegant slope of Will’s nose, the rumpled shirt clinging to his trim waist, even (especially) the bitten scabs etched into the plush curve of his lower lip.

“Will,” Hannibal breathes, unable to conjure a single thought but the name of his love.

Will turns from the window and smiles, face lighting up at the sight of Hannibal. “Hello,” he says, voice infused with warmth. “Did you check on your uncle? How is he?”

“As worse for wear as Chiyoh described him to be. I fear he does not have much time left.”

Will’s face falls, and even in this (Will’s sadness, his empathy) Hannibal is enamored. “Oh. I’m sorry. Will we be staying, then?”

“Yes. It would do no good to leave only to return in a few days for the funeral.”

Will bites on that tempting bottom lip, teeth sinking into the pink flesh. Hannibal is jealous of Will’s mouth; *he* wants to be biting that lip, and it is simply unfair that Will gets to be around himself (touch himself) at all times while Hannibal cannot.

“What are you going to do now, then?” Will asks. A faint flush covers his pale cheeks as though he is aware of Hannibal’s salacious thoughts. Perhaps he is. Perhaps Will can see the want, the lust that swims in Hannibal’s eyes, dancing to the surface of his mind like a siren luring a sailor to his death. And oh, what a sweet death it would be to be lured by Will’s siren

call and fall to his death, to die drowning in Will. For the two of them to meld into one like a river free-falling from a waterfall and returning to the ocean to surrender to the tides once more.

“I might have a few ideas,” Hannibal murmurs, coming to stand next to Will. He raises a hand and runs it through Will’s silky curls, content to simply luxuriate in the feel of them beneath his fingertips. They glide effortlessly beneath his touch, healthy and shiny, and Hannibal continues to pet for a moment without going further. Will leans into the gentle touch, eyes slowly shutting beneath Hannibal’s ministrations. Hannibal has no doubt that, were Will a cat, the boy would be purring.

“How does that feel so good?” Will asks (moans). His voice is slow, syrupy. Dripping with pleasure. “You must have magic hands. That’s why you’re such a good doctor. S’not your training. You just have magic hands.”

“Is that so?” Hannibal asks, voice low and amused. “Well, these *magic hands* are all yours now, Mylimasis. Is there anywhere else you want them to be?”

Will blinks open his eyes, pupils immediately dilating upon seeing Hannibal’s face. Hannibal is infinitely flattered by how…*attracted* Will is to him. Though he has had no shortage of lovers over the years, none have been so receptive as his Will, none so flattering in their body language, none so responsive to even the simplest of touches. Will’s love is an intoxicating thing, and Hannibal once again wishes to drown in the boy’s affections.

Will tugs on one of Hannibal’s hands and leads him toward the bed—Hannibal’s childhood bed, the one where he spent many nights screaming away the lingering nightmares that plagued him each time he shut his eyes. They sit on the edge of the mattress side by side, knees touching. Will slowly takes Hannibal’s hand and brings it to his mouth, plush lips kissing each of Hannibal’s fingertips one by one. They tingle and burn beneath Will’s mouth, and Hannibal is unable to do anything but watch, infinitely aroused that Will is initiating contact. When one hand has been kissed, Will reaches for the other, once more bringing each of Hannibal’s fingertips up to his mouth to slowly brush against his lips. By the time Will has brought the last finger to his mouth, Hannibal finds that he is breathing heavily and his eyes are narrowed, heavy-lidded with lust.

“Darling,” Hannibal murmurs. “You have no idea what your touch does to me. A simple brush of your lips against my skin, and I am undone.”

Will peers up at him and smiles. “I do know. I can see it in your eyes.”

Hannibal holds back a groan and feels his erection grow, warm and thick, inside of his slacks. “Have you decided what you want?”

Will nods and lets go of Hannibal’s hand. The skin feels cold and thin without Will there to hold it. Will licks his lips and then looks down at the mattress, tracing a random pattern over the burgundy duvet. “I want…” he begins, then stops. The spicy smell of Will’s embarrassment floods the air. “I…”

Hannibal reaches out and places his hand beneath Will's chin, tilting the boy's head up so that he is forced to look Hannibal in the eye (forced to see his love, his adoration, his complete and utter trust in whatever Will wishes).

Will calms, arousal once more taking up prominence in his scent. "I want you to hold me down. While I suck your cock."

Hannibal blinks once, twice. He nearly falls over from the wave of heat that rushes through his body and shoots into his groin. The mental image of Will, shoved onto his cock, choking on Hannibal's thick length until he spills into the boy's warm, wet mouth is so potent that Hannibal feels lightheaded from it. He grins down at Will, enjoying the shudder that runs through the boy, and nods his head.

"I am more than happy to oblige such a request. Since you will not be able to say red, if you wish to stop then lift your hand into the air with your palm open."

Will once again shudders, no doubt picturing just how…occupied his mouth will be in only a moment. "Okay. I can do that."

"Wonderful," Hannibal says. He places his hand on Will's lower back and gently guides the boy to the floor. Will kneels on the plush rug in front of Hannibal, resting his hands on both of Hannibal's thighs. "Are you comfortable? Would you like a pillow for your knees?"

"No. I want to feel it. Everything."

Hannibal closes his eyes, trying to hold on to his control, amazed at just how *perfect* Will is. "Darling, what you *do* to me."

Will leans his head down and rests it on Hannibal's inner thigh. He nuzzles at the juncture of Hannibal's pelvis, nose skimming over the impressive bulge in Hannibal's pants. "Can I take your cock out?"

"Yes," Hannibal says. "Slowly."

Will—always so eager to please—obeys Hannibal's command, slowly lifting his hands up from Hannibal's thighs and unzipping the front of his trousers. He reaches inside and gently grabs Hannibal's cock, pulling it out of the opening in his boxers. Will licks his lips, and Hannibal groans at the sight, rolling his hips into Will's delicate hold.

"Lick it," Hannibal says, gravel in his throat.

Will immediately bends down and runs his tongue from the base of Hannibal's cock all the way up, tongue following the throbbing vein along the underside of his erection. Will stops at the tip and pulls back Hannibal's foreskin, giving a small, delicate lick to the reddened head. Will moans at the taste of Hannibal's precum, his own hips jolting into the empty air.

"Now put the head into your mouth," Hannibal says.

Will glances up at him with hazy, lust-filled eyes and places the tip into his mouth, gently sucking the bead of precum that has welled up. Hannibal sits like that for a moment,

luxuriating in the feel of Will's silky wet mouth surrounding the head of his cock.

And then he thrusts inside, slamming the length of his cock into Will's mouth without warning.

He forces himself to the back of Will's throat and keeps going until Will's swollen lips are resting against his pelvis and the boy is choking, gasping, begging for air and receiving only Hannibal.

Hannibal groans and places both of his hands into Will's curls. He grabs on—grip overly tight, surely sparking pain in Will's scalp—and then grinds the head of his throbbing cock against the back of Will's fluttering throat.

Will whines, saliva dripping from the corners of his stuffed mouth and sliding down into Hannibal's pubic hair. His face is crimson, and there are tears streaming from his eyes that mix with the saliva on his chin. Hannibal looks further down and sees the bulge in Will's narrow neck where his cock is currently lodged, unmoving.

Hannibal waits. Will never lifts his hand. He continues choking, breath stuttering from his nostrils as he tries desperately to get air.

Hannibal tugs on Will's curls and pulls the boy all the way off his cock. Will gasps, drawing in breath after shuddering breath. His eyes are completely glazed over now, only the faintest hint of blue surrounding his dilated pupils. Hannibal gives the boy a second to breathe, shuddering as the cool air of the room caresses his wet cock.

When he is sure Will is no longer on the brink of passing out from a lack of oxygen, Hannibal yanks the boy's head back down, forcing him to swallow all of Hannibal's length in a single, forceful thrust. Will gags as the tip of Hannibal's cock grazes the back of his throat, and his head bucks against Hannibal's grip, desperate to get away from the sudden intrusion.

Hannibal doesn't allow him an inch. He keeps grinding, holding Will in place with a painful pull on his mussed curls. Will whines again, more saliva dripping from the corners of his mouth. Some of it falls onto Hannibal's balls, warm and moist, and Hannibal thrusts his hips at the feeling, enamored at how Will continues to fight against his hold when both of them know he is not going anywhere that Hannibal does not decide.

"Do you like being impaled on my cock, dearest?" Hannibal murmurs, moving Will's head up and down his length like a toy. He uses one hand to keep his grip on Will's curls tight, moving his other hand to wipe at the wetness on Will's chin and bring it to his mouth. He sucks his wettened fingertips into his mouth, tasting Will's saliva, his tears, and a hint of his own precum all mixed together. He groans at the taste and moves Will's head faster, feeling his pleasure rise with every slide of his cock down Will's abused throat.

Will reaches up a trembling hand and grasps Hannibal's thick, firm thigh as if holding on to a lifeline in a violent storm. Hannibal tightens his grip and watches with wonder as Will keens, so turned on from the pleasure-pain of Hannibal's hold that his hips can't stop thrusting into the empty air, desperate for some sort of friction. Hannibal takes pity on the boy and shifts his foot so that it rests on Will's crotch, pressing the tip of his Italian loafers into Will's tiny

erection. Will shudders and begins to grind his hips against Hannibal's shoe, eyes rolling into the back of his head.

"Such a slut for my cock. Do you like it when it hurts, Will? Do you like that I can force you to take it, even when you can't breathe?"

Will trembles, and his throat constricts around the head of Hannibal's cock, a silky, wet vise that squeezes the orgasm from Hannibal. It rips through his body like wildfire, pouring down Will's throat and into his stomach.

Will lets out a pitiful gurgle, swallowing as much of Hannibal's seed as he can, still rubbing his cock against Hannibal's shoe. Hannibal keeps Will's head firmly against his pelvis, grinding the rest of his come down the boy's throat before tugging him off his cock and releasing his hair. Will slumps against the floor, coughing and choking. He drags in several lungfuls of breath before Hannibal reaches down and lifts him up, placing Will into his lap.

"Such a good boy for me," he coos, wiping away the tears on Will's face. He licks at the wetness staining Will's mouth, tongue dipping inside for a moment—and he can taste his seed on Will's tongue, can feel the heat of the bruised flesh—before pulling out and licking Will's chin, his neck, all the way down to the collar of his shirt. "You did so *good* Will. How I love you."

Will shudders and turns his face into Hannibal's neck, nosing at Hannibal's pulse. Hannibal runs a soothing hand up and down the boy's back, glancing down at Will's pants. There is a dark spot staining the front of his jeans.

Will had come.

"Oh darling," Hannibal says, more in love than he was even a moment ago. "Did you find your pleasure, too? Did you come simply from my shaft down your throat and my shoe on your cock?"

Will whines, rubbing his nose against Hannibal's skin. Hannibal leans down and kisses the boy's sweaty curls, smelling the lingering traces of arousal in the moisture along his scalp.

Hannibal is content to hold Will for a time, gently rocking him back and forth as if to soothe him. Will utters not a single word, slumped in Hannibal's embrace, legs sitting astride Hannibal's own, feet dangling off the edge of the mattress. Eventually, Will pulls back from Hannibal's neck and peers up at him.

"Your cock is still out," he says, voice raspy. Ruined.

Hannibal loves the idea that it was *his* hands and cock that has caused Will's voice to sound so raw. Never has ruin been so beautiful to behold. "So it is. Would you like a shower?"

Will coughs once, pained, and nods his head. "And maybe some water too?"

"Of course, darling. There's a bathroom through the door near the window. I'll fetch you a cup of water and join you in a moment."

Will shakes his head, tears dotting his lovely blue eyes once more. “No, don’t want you to leave. Stay. The water can wait.”

Hannibal leans down and kisses the tip of Will’s nose. He pulls back and brushes the chocolate curls that have fallen onto the boy’s sweat-slick forehead, tucking them behind Will’s ear.

“I won’t leave then. Come, let’s get you cleaned up.”

Hannibal carries Will to the bathroom, quickly removing the boy’s clothing and setting it onto the countertop. He strips his own clothing and then turns on the shower faucet, waiting for the water to warm up before stepping into the stream and tugging Will along with him. He takes his time massaging the soap into Will’s delicate skin, watching with greedy eyes as the pale flesh turns red under the steaming water. He takes a handful of shampoo and then massages Will’s hair, careful not to cause any additional pain. No doubt Will’s scalp is sensitive after Hannibal’s abuse.

Will groans under Hannibal’s ministrations. The sound echoes off the tiled walls, sultry and low. Hannibal applies conditioner, delicately rubbing it into Will’s curls, and then quickly washes himself. Will watches this with half-lidded eyes, tongue coming out to lick the water off his swollen bottom lip.

“If you look at me like that, Mylimasis, we might not leave the shower at all.”

Will smirks and leans his head against Hannibal’s abdomen. His wet curls stick to Hannibal’s skin, and Hannibal adores the way Will looks pressed so tightly to his own body.

Hannibal sighs and shuts off the water, patting Will down with a fluffy burgundy towel before doing the same to his own body. Will sways on his feet, perhaps lightheaded from the steamy air, and Hannibal wraps his arm around the boy’s narrow waist, helping Will put on his clothing with perhaps more touching than is strictly necessary.

Once they are dressed, they walk hand-in-hand down the stairs. Will’s eyes wander around the opulent halls and vaulted ceilings, taking in each new room with undisguised interest.

“How long did you live here?” Will asks, staring at one of the tapestries hanging on the hallway wall.

“Should we play our game, darling? A question for a question?”

Will huffs and tugs on Hannibal’s hand, squeezing their fingers together. “But I have way more questions than you. I don’t know what you want to ask me about. This is your home, your family. I feel like I know nothing about you.”

Hannibal bends down and looks Will straight in the eyes. “You know everything of substance about me. You know who I am at my core, and you love me still. Anything else is superfluous.”

Will blushes but holds Hannibal's gaze, searching for the truth of his words. When Will is satisfied, he nods and looks back at the tapestry. Hannibal straightens and tugs on their joined hands, leading Will towards the kitchen.

"Fine," Will eventually says. "We both can ask questions. But I still think I have more to ask."

"You can think that, darling, if you wish."

Will rolls his eyes, a tiny smile threatening to spill onto his reddened lips. Hannibal wonders if they will bruise from being knocked against his pelvis so hard. The thought causes arousal to coil in the pit of his stomach (Will, lips purple, begging for more). He sighs and puts the thought away for later perusal.

"So, I already asked my question."

Hannibal smirks. "My apologies. I was brought here when I was sixteen by my uncle. I lived here—save for when I was away for boarding school—until I was twenty years old, at which time I moved to America to begin my medical training."

Will hums, eyes widening when they reach the kitchen. Even Hannibal can admit it is a rather impressive room. The ceilings are made from exposed wooden beams which run the length of the room. All of the cabinetry has been updated, though the wood is the same species as was used in the original manor. All of the appliances have been updated as well, including the monstrous chest freezer which holds the meat from each of the animals raised and butchered on the estate.

Hannibal lets go of Will's hand—reluctantly and with immediate regret—and fetches a clean glass from one of the cabinets, pleased to see that everything is still kept in the same space as when he moved out. He fills the glass with water and hands it to Will who immediately tilts it back and drains the entire thing, Adam's apple bobbing with each greedy swallow.

"Another?" Hannibal asks, amused.

"Is that your question?" Will responds, slightly out of breath from having drunk for so long.

"I suppose so," Hannibal says. He eyes the line of water above Will's upper lip and only just manages not to lean down and lick it up himself.

"Then yes, I would."

Hannibal dutifully fills up the glass and brings it back to Will. This time Will manages to sip on the water rather than gulp it down. "You can bring that with you," Hannibal says. "I would like to give you a tour of the estate. It will be yours one day, after all."

Will spits out the water in his mouth and sprays it onto a nearby cabinet. "What?" he sputters, water still dripping from his lips. "What are you talking about?"

Hannibal raises an eyebrow and grabs a clean cloth, dabbing at Will's mouth with gentle movements before cleaning up the cabinet. "You are next in line after me to inherit the Lecter

estate and all that it entails. That includes this home."

Will, apparently still reeling from the revelation, places his hand on the counter for stability. Hannibal takes Will's hand off the countertop and gently guides Will to one of the chairs in the corner. Will sits and immediately slumps against the back. His hands tremble, nearly sloshing the water out of the cup and onto the floor. Hannibal plucks the glass from Will's hand and bends down so that he is crouching in front of Will.

"Are you upset?" he asks. He does not smell anger in the boy's scent, but there is something new that Hannibal cannot yet place, an emotion that Will has not felt often enough in his presence for Hannibal to be able to immediately recognize it.

"No." Will sighs and slumps further down so that his neck is resting against the back of the chair. He stares at the ceiling, eyes tracing the wooden beams, and holds out one of his hands. Hannibal instantly takes it, holding it perhaps a bit too tightly. "I'm just…shocked, I guess? I mean, I knew you said I was part of your family. And you mentioned a fortune, but I just… didn't know what to expect. After seeing this place—after seeing your family—I guess it's just becoming real now." Will lifts his free hand (the one Hannibal is not gripping on to) and pinches the bridge of his nose. "Are you sure that this is what you want? You want *me* to one day inherit this?"

"I want nothing more in the world. You are everything to me, Will, and you deserve everything in return. I only apologize that it is not more."

Will gasps and shoots up, staring at Hannibal with wide eyes. "You have already given me everything, Hannibal. I can't even imagine what more would look like. I don't want to imagine it. I already told you, as long as we're together then there is nothing more that I need." Will bites his bottom lip, eyes glossy with unshed tears. "I've been on my own for years, Hannibal. Years. I had absolutely nothing except what my own hands could find. And then you found me, and suddenly everything was within reach. I had food, a roof, clothes that fit." He stares into Hannibal's eyes (into his soul). "And someone I love to share it with."

Hannibal surges forward and kisses Will, noting with surprise that there are tears on his own face. They mingle with Will's, both sets trailing down and filling their kiss with salt. Hannibal licks at Will's swollen lips, kissing away the tears (the lingering pain) until Will is gasping against him, tongue swirling with his own until there are no more tears, only him and Will together as one.

Someone coughs behind them, and Will jerks away, quickly wiping at his wet lips with the back of his hand. Hannibal leisurely leans back, unconcerned about an audience. If it is a member of the staff who has interrupted them then they are too well-trained and too loyal to make Will feel uncomfortable. If it is a member of his family, well, Hannibal must explain the nature of his and Will's relationship at some point. He supposes that now is as good a time as ever.

With a sigh, Hannibal turns to greet their guest. He finds Chiyoh leaning against the wall, arms crossed over her chest and an amused expression on her face.

“I was looking for you two. I checked the bedroom, but it was empty. Why am I not surprised to find you now in the kitchen?”

Hannibal stands and holds out his hand for Will. The boy takes it, legs trembling, and Hannibal pulls Will to his side, sliding an arm around Will’s waist to keep him standing. “I see you know me too well. There are few rooms in this house I have spent more time in than the kitchen.”

Chiyoh quirks an eyebrow and points to the hallway. “Pat and Andres will be down soon to cook lunch. Perhaps your…Will would like a tour in the meantime?”

“We were just about to embark on our own tour,” Hannibal responds. “You are welcome to join us if you wish.”

“How kind of you to offer,” Chiyoh responds, voice dry.

Will stiffens at Hannibal’s side, clearly not thrilled to have someone else joining them. Hannibal leans down and whispers into his ear, “If you want it to just be the two of us, you only have to say, darling.”

Will shakes his head. “It’s fine.” His voice is light and breathy with an undertone of raspiness that Hannibal hopes won’t fade for some time.

“Excellent,” Hannibal responds. “Let us get started, then.”

Chiyoh turns and leaves the kitchen. Will and Hannibal follow behind, Hannibal’s arm never leaving his boy’s waist. Hannibal shows Will the various portraits that line the walls, some dating back to the fifteenth century when the manor was first built. “The Lecters did not buy this property until after World War II, so none of these paintings are of relatives of mine.” Will tilts his head, studying each one with serious eyes. Hannibal smiles, pleased to see Will so enthralled with the portraits. He knows that not everyone shares his same passion for the arts, but he is happy to find that Will—even if he does not share the exact love that Hannibal does—is still appreciative of its beauty.

They continue their tour, Hannibal and Chiyoh explaining each room and its various features. By the time they are finished, lunch has been cooked and is served to them on steaming plates in the dining room. Will eats with his usual vigor, and Hannibal speaks with Chiyoh, sending amused glances to his boy throughout the meal.

“I am assuming you liked the food?” Chiyoh asks once they have all finished. A staff member comes to take away their empty plates, nodding his head respectfully to Hannibal and eyeing Will with curiosity before leaving the room.

Will blushes and bites his bottom lip. “Yes, it was great.” He peers over at Hannibal, a hint of mirth in his eyes as he says, “But not as good as Hannibal’s cooking.”

Hannibal preens, uncaring of how ridiculous he looks. “You are too kind to me, darling.”

Will further flushes at the term of endearment, the tips of his ears turning a deep red. “It’s true. No offense to the cooks here, of course. It’s far nicer than anything I had before…” Will’s voice trails off into silence. Chiyoh watches Will with her own curiosity but doesn’t press him to finish his sentence for which Hannibal is grateful. For if Chiyoh had made Will uncomfortable, they would have had a long, lengthy discussion on just how his boy is to be treated, and though Hannibal respects Chiyoh greatly, his love for Will far surpasses that respect.

They head into the foyer afterward, Will’s eyes growing sleepy. He still has a habit of falling asleep after each meal, and Hannibal is nothing but adoring of this, content to let Will sleep and eat as much as he likes. After what his boy has endured, Hannibal wants nothing but pleasure and comfort for him in any way that Hannibal can provide.

“Do you want to see the grounds?” Chiyoh asks, crossing her legs. “Most things are covered in snow, but it is still quite beautiful to look at.”

Will’s eyelids flutter, and he quickly raises his hand to try and hide his yawn. Though he fails in this endeavor, he is far too adorable for Hannibal to utter a word. “That sounds cool. Could we go later? I’m really tired, and I don’t want to be rude and fall asleep during your tour.”

Chiyoh smiles, a rare sight that surprises Hannibal, and nods her head. “Of course. Why don’t you rest. We can postpone until later this afternoon. The sun will still be out for a few more hours.”

Will’s shoulders relax. “That’s great.” He turns his brilliant blue eyes to Hannibal. “Can I take a nap?”

“You can do whatever you wish, darling,” Hannibal responds. “I’ll take you to our room and make sure you’re settled in.”

Will smiles and stands, stretching his arms over his head. “Okay. Thanks for the tour, Chiyoh. It was nice to learn more about the house.”

Chiyoh tilts her head and watches Hannibal guide Will out of the room and up the staircase. Once Will is tucked into bed, Hannibal has to step back and simply admire him for a moment. His pale skin is vibrant against the burgundy duvet and sheets, curls spilling onto the pillow like melted chocolate spilling onto wine. His thick, black lashes flutter closed after only a moment, and Will nuzzles further into the soft pillows, almost instantly asleep.

The sight of Will laying in the bed where Hannibal had spent so many hours laying (yearning for the life he has right now and thinking it was never to be) is enough to cause Hannibal’s heart to stutter beneath his ribs. He goes back down the stairs and sees Chiyoh waiting for him at the base of the staircase, arms once more crossed over her chest.

“So, that is your companion,” she says, voice perfectly even.

“Yes, that is Will,” Hannibal responds.

“He is…sweet,” she says as though tasting the word for the first time in her mouth.

“He is perfect.”

Chiyoh lifts an eyebrow but says nothing. They walk into the foyer together, and once seated, Chiyoh says, “Lady Murasaki is asking for you. I told her you were taking Will on a tour of the estate.”

Hannibal sighs and rolls his shoulders. It was inevitable, of course, that his returning home would mean a confrontation with his aunt. “Is she still with my uncle?”

“No. She is inside her own room. Would you like me to tell her you are still busy?”

“I appreciate it, but no. I will see her myself.”

“As you wish.”

What Hannibal *wishes* is that he never has to see his aunt again, but sadly that is not to be. Not yet, at least. With a heavy heart, Hannibal goes upstairs to his aunt’s private room which is connected to his uncle’s by a secret passage inside. He knocks on the bedroom door once, twice, and then waits, smoothing down the front of his shirt and adjusting the sleeves of his coat jacket.

Lady Murasaki opens the door with a flourishing swing, staring at Hannibal for a moment longer than is polite. She trails her eyes over his torso and long legs before eventually looking back up to his face.

“Hannibal,” she says, and it is the first time he has heard her voice in a decade, the first time they have spoken since Hannibal confessed his love for her, and she rejected him with nary a glance backwards.

“Murasaki,” he responds, voice cool but polite. “You wished to see me?”

She opens the door wider and gestures for him to come inside.

With a firm shake of his head, Hannibal declines the offer. “I am afraid I cannot. If you wish to speak, I would be happy to do so downstairs, in the foyer. Otherwise, our conversation will have to be like this.”

Lady Murasaki’s face, usually so carefully blank, fills with a violent anger that is quickly swept under her mask—and of course her mask is nearly perfected. It was she, after all, who taught Hannibal how to carefully control his own emotions. “I see. You had no qualms about attending to your uncle in his private room.”

“We were not alone. And you and I are both not so naive as to think our relationship is the same as the one I have with my uncle.”

“Very well. I simply wished to…inquire about your recent adoption. Will is his name, correct?”

Hannibal sighs. “You already know the answer to that question. Is there something in particular you wish to know about him?”

Lady Murasaki sneers at this, delicate nose twisting up with the motion. It is quite an unpleasant sight, and Hannibal wonders how he ever thought he was in love with the woman in front of him. Now that he has experienced actual love, it seems laughable that what he felt for his aunt was anything other than misguided esteem.

“Where did you get such a thing? And why on earth is he now an heir to the estate? You pluck him off the streets of some random city slum and then expect us to welcome him with open arms?”

Hannibal’s entire being burns with anger, so hot it turns his body an icy cool that he has never experienced before. He keeps his voice and face level as he responds, “Is that not what happened to me? Was I not also plucked off the streets—as you so eloquently put it—and then brought here to be welcomed? Will is mine. He is a Lecter. And there is nothing you, or anyone else, can do about it.”

Lady Murasaki clenches one of her delicate, pale hands into a closed fist. Her eyes burn as much as Hannibal’s, and neither one of them says anything, too consumed in their own fury to speak. Hannibal knows that if he were to open his mouth again, the only thing to come out would be venom that would leave Lady Murasaki scarred and wounded, and though the thought has merit, now is not the time, not with his uncle on death’s door only a few feet away.

“Good day, Lady Murasaki,” Hannibal says. “I hope we can remain amicable with one another throughout the duration of my stay.”

Lady Murasaki straightens, unclenching her hand. She grabs at the doorknob of her door and tilts her nose into the air, looking down at Hannibal from the pale expanse of her throat. “Good day, Hannibal.” She closes the door with slightly more force than is necessary, and Hannibal frowns, rolls his shoulders.

He walks downstairs, still frowning, and goes to find Chiyoh. Desperate to put the interaction out of his mind, he spends the remainder of the afternoon going over estate business with Chiyoh and his uncle’s lawyer. They discuss his uncle’s will, and Hannibal is once more reminded of his conversation with Lady Murasaki. It leaves a bitter taste in his mouth, and he is delighted when Will stumbles down the stairs not long after, hair mussed and clothing rumpled from his nap.

“Is it still too late to go outside?” Will asks, voice raspy.

“Not at all, darling.” Hannibal sends away the lawyer and directs Chiyoh to fetch them some hot tea to drink while they are outside in the cold. “Why don’t you put on your coat and shoes and then we can go outside.”

“Okay,” Will says. He glances around the empty room before leaning down and quickly pecking Hannibal’s cheek. The feel of his lips linger long after he’s gone upstairs to change. Hannibal traces his cheek, feeling where Will had kissed him, and is only partially annoyed with how much his skin tingles. It’s only a simple kiss, but with Will, every touch seems to affect him, no matter how small.

They head outside soon after, and Hannibal grabs Will's hand, holding his steaming mug of tea with the other. He sips on the tea as they tour the nearby grounds, Chiyoh pointing out some of the more interesting features. When they reach the stables, Will nearly spills tea all over himself in his excitement, gesturing wildly to the horses, sheep, cattle, and dogs with exaggerated movements.

"You didn't tell me you had *dogs*," he cries, voice reaching uncharted levels of excitement.

"I didn't think it important," Hannibal replies, not caring to conceal the amusement in his voice. "Would you like to meet them?"

"Yes!" Will practically screams, dragging Hannibal behind him as they stride over to the barn. There are half a dozen dogs milling about in the hay, all the same breed of cattle dog. They are used to herd the sheep and cattle and keep them on the property, but because of the snow, most of the animals have stayed inside the barn rather than brave the cold. With nothing to herd, the dogs now laze about, idly chewing sticks or roughhousing in the hay.

One of the stable hands, no doubt able to hear Will's scream, comes out to greet them. He patiently introduces each of the dogs to Will, telling him their name and duty on the estate. Will coos at each one, dropping his tea into the snow and petting each dog; when one leaves, another quickly comes to take its place, and soon Will is surrounded on all sides by the furry mutts, laughing and giggling. His scent soars with happiness, honey-sweet and slightly spiced, almost like a warm cup of cinnamon hot chocolate. Hannibal coats his tongue in the scent and sighs, content to watch Will roll around with the dogs (even if Will is wearing his handmade silk coat that will no doubt need to be dry-cleaned later. Will could dirty a thousand handmade coats if it would cause his face to light up in pleasure like it is now).

Dinner is a more subdued affair. Lady Murasaki joins them at the dinner table, and her glares are neither subtle nor becoming. Each shift of her eyes from Will to Hannibal is dagger-like, and Hannibal wants to rip her eyes from their sockets and feed them to Will. *No one* should be looking at his darling in such a way, especially a member of Hannibal's (now Will's) family.

Will is quiet when dessert is brought out. Even without his empathy, Lady Murasaki's toxic anger would be easy to see. Hannibal can't even imagine how powerful the anger must feel with Will's gift to aid in feeling it. Hannibal remembers Will calling his empathy disorder a curse; his heart aches as he imagines Will constantly surrounded by negative emotions, never able to not feel them, always sensing each toxic trait until he was drowning in the negativity. Hannibal reaches out and grabs Will's hand, looking at his boy with (what he hopes) is enough love to block out anything else Will is sensing.

Will looks at him, love and gratitude shining from his own eyes, and squeezes Hannibal's hand.

Thank you he mouths, lifting a *palmier* cookie to his mouth and biting down.

Hannibal smiles and squeezes back, certain that if he were anymore in love, it would burst from his chest and flood the entire room.

The next day is spent in much the same way as the first. Will wakes just as breakfast is being served, and he sleepily makes his way through the meal, relieved that Hannibal's aunt is not there to join them. Will spends some time in various parts of the mansion (there is no way that Will can think of it as something so mundane as a house) including the stables. He plays with the dogs for an hour or two, ignoring the look (both amused and pained) that Hannibal sends his way when he ends up in a pile of mud near one of the stalls. For lunch, the cooks make something called a *croque monsieur* that Will instantly inhales. He again ignores Hannibal's look of amused pain at his eating habits, instead asking Chiyoh questions of what Hannibal was like as a teenager, enjoying each of the answers he gets in response.

"He really did that?" Will asks, wiping away a trail of crumbs from his upper lip.

"Indeed," Chiyoh replies. "He could not be persuaded to stay away. The girl's mother was speechless, of course, but it all worked out in the end. Her arm healed, and her father mysteriously vanished."

Will glances over at Hannibal, whose face has remained stoic throughout their conversation. "Amazing," Will says, eyes sliding back over to Chiyoh. "I'm so glad she was okay."

Chiyoh hums and stands, gesturing for Will to do the same. "I found some old books in the attic that I think might interest you. Would you care to join me in the study?"

"Yes!" Will says, jumping up from his seat. Hannibal follows behind at a leisurely pace, hands crossed behind his back, his long overcoat flowing behind his knees with each stride.

They walk down the hall and into the study. It has long, open windows, similar to the ones in Hannibal's office, and Will wonders if the man intentionally (or perhaps unintentionally) bought a home in Baltimore that mimicked this one in France.

Chiyoh leads Will to one of the many tables set up in the large space and points to a stack of old, leather books on the corner. "These are all in French, but they do a good job of explaining the history of the estate. Would you like me to read them to you?"

Will blushes and shakes his head. "Thanks, but I think I can read them on my own. If I need help, I can ask you or Hannibal to explain something."

"As you wish."

Will picks up the nearest book—a heavy tome with a red leather cover that's begun to shred at the corners—and opens it to the first page. Hannibal sits beside him, the smell of his cologne wonderfully comforting. It mixes well with the scent of the old books, and Will greedily exhales, pretending not to notice Hannibal's small, smug grin.

Will spends the next hour reading, lost to the history he finds in the thin, yellowed pages. Whenever he stumbles across a word he doesn't recognize, he points to it and shows Hannibal, shivering each time Hannibal reads the French word aloud before defining it for Will. Chiyoh sits in the corner near the fireplace pretending to read her own book. Will knows she is actually watching him and Hannibal, and the constant attention makes him uncomfortable.

Will tries to ignore her wandering eyes and instead focuses on the warmth of the room, the steady crackling of the fire in its ancient hearth, the heat of Hannibal so close and yet not touching. The atmosphere lulls him into complacency, and he slumps against the wooden chair, eyes half-lidded as he continues to read.

And then it all comes crashing down.

“Count Lecter!” a voice shouts from the hall. It’s a woman’s voice, high-pitched and frantic. “Sir! It’s your uncle. He’s had another stroke.”

Hannibal shoots up from his chair, dashing from the study and leaving the hall at an alarming pace. Will moves to follow him, but Chiyoh grabs his wrist and holds him back.

“Not now,” she murmurs into his ear. “Let him be alone with his uncle in these final moments.”

Will tugs on his wrist, unsurprised when Chiyoh’s tight grip does not budge. “Let me *go*,” he says, pulling with all his might. “Hannibal wants me by his side. He would want me to be there with him.”

“No.” Chiyoh’s voice is cold, firm.

Tears spring in Will’s eyes and flow down his cheeks, hot and wet. They land at the corners of his lips and flood his mouth with the taste of salt. He bites his bottom lip, sucking up the burst of blood in a vain attempt to gain some semblance of control over his trembling form. He feels trapped, desperate. He hates it. “Please,” he begs, unashamed at the desperation in his voice. “Let me go to him. Please.”

Chiyoh remains unmoved. She pulls his wrist and drags him across the study to the wooden chair where he was just sitting. She tugs again until he is sprawled in the seat. The room swims in his vision, his tears obscuring everything until it is all just vague shapes and colors. Will can’t remember the last time he felt so unhinged. Even his father did not trap him in such a way; Will was always faster, always smaller. If his father’s fists grew too heavy, Will could usually get away before the pain became too much.

Now, though, Chiyoh’s grip is far tighter. Her hold too powerful. Will tugs once more, noting in the back of his mind (the small part that that isn’t swimming in fear) that the skin on his wrist is now bruised and swollen. No doubt it will hurt for days to come. Will whines, a high, pitiful sound that echoes in the large room.

“Please,” he begs again. He can’t remember the last time he begged in such a way (yes he can. It was the day his father beat him bloody and tossed him outside like yesterday’s trash. He feels just as hopeless now, knowing that Hannibal is hurting and unable to go be at his side).

“Will, this is between Hannibal and his uncle. When Robertus has passed, you are free to go be at Hannibal’s side. Until then, you will stay put.”

Will gives one last, weak tug. His arm burns, fire licking up from his shoulder and into his straining neck. Perhaps he has pulled a muscle in his attempt to escape. He whimpers at the throbbing pain and desperately wishes he were with Hannibal, that it was Hannibal causing the pain (that Hannibal would see his wrist and break Chiyoh's wrist in return, then curse her for hurting what is his alone to touch).

They sit in silence for minutes, hours, days. Will cannot tell. Everything is a blur in his mind, the pain in his wrist and arm only growing in intensity rather than lessening as time passes on in a dull haze of pain and agony. Tears continue to flow down his face, unchecked, and Will shudders in his seat, wondering if there were ever a time he felt more wretched. Even when he was huddled under his pitiful, hand-made shelter, starved and cold and alone, he did not know there was anything else and so the pain seemed almost muted in a way. Now, though, he has tasted Hannibal's affection, his love, his all-consuming *possession* of Will, and to be taken away from that for even a moment is hurting Will like no other pain he has ever experienced in his life.

Eventually, another one of the staff members comes into the study. He sees Will sitting next to Chiyoh—his eyes lingering on Chiyoh's hand wrapped firmly around Will's delicate wrist—and clears his throat with more force than is necessary.

"Count Lecter has passed," he announces, voice grim. His own eyes are red-rimmed, and Will wonders how much he actually cared for Robertus (how much he will care for Hannibal, now that Hannibal is the owner of this estate). "The family requests both of your presence in the late count's bedroom."

Chiyoh nods her head and stands, pulling Will up along with her. He grits his teeth at the ache in his wrist, reminding himself that this simple injury is nothing compared to what his father used to bestow on a daily basis. Still, after months of sweet touches and pampering (and the occasional roughness that Hannibal bestows on a completely willing Will), Will is unprepared for such a thing to be inflicted upon him, and he shudders with each laborious step, careful not to get closer to Chiyoh than is necessary as they make their way up the stairs.

When they reach Robertus's bedroom, Chiyoh knocks on the door and waits for it to be opened, hand still gripping Will's chafed wrist. Lady Murasaki opens the door, eyes red and puffy. She glances at Will's wrist with mild disdain before tilting her head, motioning for Will and Chiyoh to come inside.

Hannibal is standing next to Robertus's bed, hands folded in front of him. A man in a white coat is writing down something on a chart. His eyes are huge and watery beneath his wire-rim glasses, and Will wonders if this is an act too, or if Robertus just had excellent taste in hiring people and then endearing them to him.

"Hannibal," Will says, the sound of it loud in the quiet room despite the hushed tone of his voice.

Hannibal looks over, eyes taking in Will's face (no doubt seeing the tears still streaking down his cheeks and the blood of his bitten bottom lip) before snapping to where Chiyoh continues to hold his wrist, her grip only slightly softened now that they have reached Robertus's room.

“Will,” Hannibal responds. His voice is tight. Barely controlled.

Will has never seen him so angry before.

It sends a shudder down his spine.

This he thinks. *This* is what countless people must have seen before they died. This is the real Hannibal, the one that hides behind his zipped-up person suit on a daily basis. This raw, unfiltered emotion, this smoldering fire that burns in Hannibal’s maroon eyes and threatens to singe Will until he is nothing but ash. This is what Hannibal truly is.

And oh, what a glorious sight it is to behold.

Hannibal walks over to Chiyoh in a few firm, smooth strides. He reaches down and plucks her hand into his own, removing it from Will’s arm. Will is sure everyone can hear Hannibal’s sharp intake of breath at seeing the damage done to Will’s wrist. Will refuses to look down, to tear his eyes away for even a second, so enamored by Hannibal’s anger that he is unable to do anything but stare in awe.

“Will,” Hannibal murmurs again. He reaches down and (gently, delicately) places Will’s limp hand into his own. Hannibal raises it to his plush lips and kisses Will’s hand, lips moving down from his fingers until they reach the purple wring of angry bruises that line Will’s pale wrist. Will’s skin tingles beneath the reverent touch, each brush of Hannibal’s lips sending a shock of pleasure-pain down his spine.

Lady Murasaki clears her throat, and Hannibal’s spine stiffens. He (gently, delicately) lowers Will’s hand, still holding it in his own palm. They walk back to Robertus’s bed, side by side, and Hannibal’s breathing begins to even out the longer he stares down at the corpse of his uncle. It should probably concern Will that Hannibal is more comfortable looking at the dead than the living but…Will feels the same way. The dead are so uncomplicated, bodies washed of all emotion and feeling, a soothing balm to Will’s overactive empathy. Will gazes down at Robertus’s pale, unmoving face and feels a sense of calm returning to his own harried mind.

They stand like that for a while. Various people come in and out of the room. The doctor eventually leaves, presumably to give the family privacy, but that privacy is shattered a moment later when Robertus’s lawyer enters the room and begins whispering in harsh tones to Lady Murasaki. Will catches his own name being thrown around like a sharpened dart, and he huddles his shoulders, happy to be by Hannibal’s side despite their current company.

“Come, darling,” Hannibal whispers. “There is nothing we can do now for Robertus. There is, however, something I can do for you. Let me tend to your wrist.”

Again, Will shivers at the icy anger in Hannibal’s tone. Only a fool would question such authority, the power radiating from Hannibal’s strong form more than enough to put fear into even the toughest of predators. The only reason Will feels no fear is because he knows that Hannibal’s anger is not directed at him; it is him that the anger is protecting, and the thought warms something inside of his chest.

He snuggles against Hannibal's side and allows the man to guide him from the room and down the hall. They walk into their own bedroom, hands still clasped together, until Hannibal gently sets him down on the bed. He smooths a hand down Will's cheek, wiping away the last of Will's tears. Hannibal lifts his finger into his mouth and sucks the moisture from his skin, eyes briefly closing as if to savor the taste. Will feels a jolt of arousal down his spine, and he presses his lips together to keep from whining. Now was not the time.

Later, perhaps.

Hannibal goes into the bathroom, and Will can't help the whine that now escapes his trembling throat. He hates the distance between him and Hannibal now that he is finally at Hannibal's side, and he feels desperate to eliminate any and all space between the two of them. Hannibal quickly returns carrying a leather bag. He coos at Will, shushing the sobs that rise and build in his shaking chest. The older man sets the bag down onto the bed and runs a hand along Will's spine, the back of his neck, his curls. Each swipe of Hannibal's warm, broad palm lessens the longing in Will until he is still, no longer quivering.

"There, darling. You are doing so well for me. Such a good boy. May I look at your wrist? I want to make sure you were not…injured more than what I can currently see."

Will nods, not trusting his voice. Hannibal coos at him once more before lightly grasping his forearm and lifting his hand until his wrist is parallel to Hannibal's eyes. Will doesn't flinch as Hannibal gently presses the bruised skin, searching for a sprain or break. Something darkens in his maroon eyes as he touches Will's flesh, and that darkness only deepens when he continues his examination of Will's arm and shoulder.

"Your wrist is sprained and bruised but not broken," Hannibal says. His voice is deeper than Will has ever heard it before, like a rock sinking into an endless pool of water. "Your shoulder is nearly dislocated, but I do not believe it will need to be set into a sling. Can you move it for me, dearest?"

Will peers up at Hannibal, unable to keep the love and trust from his gaze even as he rolls his shoulder. He bites on his bottom lip, sucking at the fresh flow of blood to keep his cry of pain inside.

Hannibal frowns, immediately picking up on his discomfort, and runs his hand once more along Will's shoulder. "I…"

Will lowers his shoulder and tilts his head. "You?"

Hannibal growls low in his throat, and Will shudders at the noise. "I cannot *bear* that you were hurt. That you were marked by another's hand. That you were subjected to pain while I idly stood by, completely unaware. You are *mine* Will."

"Yours," Will breathes, in pain and aroused all at once, amazed at how often those two things seem to clash in his life. "Only yours."

"She *touched* you," Hannibal says, and his voice drags along Will's ears, deep and raspy and so angry that the words practically vibrate with hatred. "No one is allowed to touch you but

me."

"Yes," Will gasps, high and breathy.

Hannibal snarls and drags Will into his lap. He shoves his face into Will's exposed neck and begins sucking a mark into the delicate flesh, his mouth hot and insistent. Will whines and tilts his head further back, encouraging Hannibal to mark him further, to show everyone else that Will is owned, completely and fully. Hannibal wraps his arms around Will's waist and pulls him so that their two bodies are flush, chest to chest. Will curls his toes as Hannibal continues to suck at in the same spot, pleasure-pain pouring from the forming bruise.

"*Hannibal*," Will keens. He rocks his hips against Hannibal's stomach, cock throbbing when Hannibal bites at the tender skin.

Hannibal pulls back, cheeks flushed and lips spit-slick and red. Will pants, struggling to focus on anything but the feel of his heartbeat pounding in the bruised skin of his neck. "Darling," Hannibal says, his own voice shaking, "what happened?"

Will forces himself to focus on Hannibal's voice, his words. "Chiyoh," he gasps. "She told me I couldn't follow you. Said you had to be alone."

Hannibal growls, throat vibrating with the loud noise, and Will instinctively tilts his neck, presenting himself to Hannibal as something non-threatening. Hannibal nuzzles the bruise mark he just sucked into Will's skin, kissing over the tender flesh. "She forced you to stay by holding onto your wrist?"

"Yes," Will sobs, overstimulated on all fronts; from Hannibal's intoxicating scent, from the feel of Hannibal's warm, soft lips on the bruise on his neck, from the throbbing pain in his wrist and arm, from the anxiety and lust swirling in his stomach like branches caught in the whipping winds of a powerful storm.

Hannibal gently kisses his mark one final time before pulling away, wiping the saliva from his lips. "She was absolutely out of line. You are *always* welcome by my side, Will. You are mine, and I am yours. We are one. There is no separating us."

Will nods his head, threading his fingers through Hannibal's silky hair and dragging him in for a kiss. Hannibal licks the blood from Will's bottom lip, thrusting his tongue into Will's waiting mouth and sharing the coppery taste with Will. Will moans, licking away his own blood before twining his tongue with Hannibal's and swirling the two of them around. Hannibal licks at his tongue, his teeth, his lips, before placing another searing kiss against his open mouth. By the time they part, both of them are breathing heavily and Hannibal's hair is mussed and messy, nothing like the put-together style he usually keeps.

"I'll bring her here at once," Hannibal says once his breathing has calmed. "She will have to explain her actions to the both of us."

"Okay," Will whispers. He does not care about Chiyoh or what happened; Hannibal is here. Hannibal loves him. Hannibal will protect him. That is all that matters.

Hannibal reaches into his back pocket and pulls out his phone. Will catches Chiyoh's name at the top, but Hannibal's fingers fly too fast over the glass screen for Will to make out the message he sends. As quickly as he pulled it out, Hannibal places the phone back inside of his pocket, not waiting for a reply. He does not let go of Will or move Will from off of his lap; if anything, Hannibal holds him tighter, tucking his nose into Will's neck and breathing in Will's scent like a man starved.

Will relaxes into Hannibal's embrace, allowing the warmth of him (the safety, the power) to wash away the bitter aftertaste of Chiyoh's hold.

A few moments later, there's a knock on the door.

"Come in," Hannibal growls, voice muffled against Will's neck.

Chiyoh opens the door, and Will can *smell* the fear pouring off of her, anxiety and frustration and fright all coalescing into one nauseatingly powerful scent. She trembles with each step into their room, though her head remains held high. Will isn't sure whether to congratulate Chiyoh on her bravery or condemn her for her foolishness. He decides to withhold any judgment, content to remain inside Hannibal's arms and wait to see what happens.

"Chiyoh," Hannibal says, raising his head to face her.

A shudder ripples through Chiyoh's body, and Will can only imagine the look on Hannibal's face right now.

"Hannibal," she replies, voice slightly too breathy to be considered calm. "You wished to see me?"

Hannibal straightens his spine and pulls Will even closer until Will's legs are straddling Hannibal's waist and both their chests are pressed firmly together. Each breath Will takes pushes against Hannibal's abdomen, and each breath Hannibal lets out fans warm air over Will's face.

"What happened?" Hannibal spits out. Will has never heard him so agitated, so not-in-control of his emotions. The thought that it is because of Will that Hannibal has finally lost control does… things to Will's stomach.

"It was your aunt," Chiyoh says, blurting out the words as if to hold them inside her mouth for any longer would burn her tongue. "She forbade me from allowing Will near you until she sent someone to fetch us. She said that only family was allowed in the room with your uncle during his passing."

"Will *is* family," Hannibal hisses. His grip borders on painful as he tugs Will to his chest. Will revels in the feeling, nearly high off the possessiveness that Hannibal is showing towards him. Never has Will been treated as such a precious, sacred thing, and Hannibal's righteous anger on his behalf is a heady thing to behold. "Will is mine. He is a Lecter. And to deny him his rightful place by my side is not only disloyal to me, it is disloyal to this entire family."

“Please,” Chiyoh whimpers, tears streaming down her face. Will nearly laughs at how upside-down this scene is, a mimicry of his pleading only a few hours before. “I was just following orders.”

Hannibal carefully lifts Will’s injured wrist and presents it to Chiyoh. In the fading light of the evening, the bruises appear deeper, harsher along Will’s pale wrist, a black snake coiling its way along his flesh. Chiyo winces at the sight, turning her head towards the window.

Coward.

“And was *this* just following orders?” Hannibal asks, voice deadly quiet.

“He was struggling,” Chiyoh says. Her voice is shaking nearly as badly as her hands. She shoves her hands under her armpits, but Will can still see them trembling. “I had to keep him away.”

“You had to do no such thing. I am disgusted by your actions today. From now on, you are no longer allowed to be in Will’s presence except when I am there to watch over you. If he is in a room, you are to leave it immediately. If he speaks, you are to follow any order given without question or complaint.” Hannibal pauses, and his voice drops even lower. “And if my aunt *ever* orders you to keep Will from me again, know that I will sever your hands from your body before I allow you to touch him. He is mine. He is under my protection. And I will see to it that no harm is ever to befall him again.”

With a final, trembling nod, Chiyoh darts from the bedroom, unable to hide the sob that falls from her lips as she closes the door behind her. As soon as she is gone, Will sags in Hannibal’s arms, suddenly exhausted.

“Oh darling,” Hannibal says, brushing a curl from Will’s forehead. “You must be so tired. Would you like to rest? I can have someone bring you some dinner to eat. I insist you take some pain medication as well.”

“I don’t care,” Will murmurs, laying his forehead against Hannibal’s. “As long as you’re here, I don’t care.”

“I will always be here, Will. As long as you’ll have me.” Hannibal kisses the tip of his nose and sighs, pulling out his phone once more from his back pocket. He types several messages while Will relaxes against his broad chest, content to soak in Hannibal’s love like an empty sponge that will never be completely filled.

It seems only a moment before there’s another knock on their door and Andres brings in two steaming dishes of food. He, too, looks as though he has been crying. Will looks into the man’s eyes and detects no falsehood, only genuine grief, and it saddens Will that he never truly got to know the man who has inspired such feelings of loyalty in his own staff members.

“Thank you,” Will says, reaching out for the plate.

“Of course, Mister Lecter,” Andres replies, voice thick with his French accent. “I am deeply sympathetic for your loss.”

Hannibal nods his head, taking his own plate of food. Once Andres leaves, the two of them eat in silence. As soon as the food is finished, Hannibal reaches into his medical bag and hands Will two small white pills to take. Will swallows them with a glass of water, watching with half-lidded eyes as Hannibal wraps up his injured wrist in a tan-colored bandage. Hannibal leans down and kisses the bandage once it is in place, and Will melts against the older man, his spine dissolving into a puddle on the mattress.

“Sleep,” Will mumbles.

“Of course, darling. Rest now. I will watch over you.”

It is these words that give Will the courage to lay down, back facing the door, and fall into a deep slumber.

When he wakes, Hannibal is pressed against his back, one of his heavy arms thrown haphazardly over Will’s waist. Will smiles and snuggles further into the warm embrace, content to simply lay and luxuriate in the feel of Hannibal around him. It is not often that he wakes before Hannibal, and Will treasures this quiet moment, even with the pain in his wrist and shoulder.

Eventually, though, Hannibal stirs, and the two of them shower and change into all-black clothing. Hannibal leads them both downstairs for breakfast, and Will notes that each member of the staff is wearing a black band of fabric around their upper arm.

“It is tradition,” Hannibal tells him, noticing the question in his eyes. “When a member of the household dies, the staff each wear one of the black armbands for a week.”

“They are actually sad he’s gone,” Will says. “I didn’t expect that.”

“My uncle was a powerful figure. A force to be reckoned with, if you will. He was loved by many, and will continue to be loved even as they mourn his passing.”

Hannibal guides him into the kitchen, and the two of them eat a light breakfast before Hannibal’s phone begins to ring. He answers it with jerky motions, speaking rapid French as Will scarfs down the rest of his breakfast. Hannibal’s words are clipped, sharp, and Will wonders if it is Chiyoh on the other end. He doubts she wishes to speak with Hannibal in person after what happened yesterday.

“*D'accord. Nous y serons bientôt.*” Hannibal hangs up and rolls his shoulders, another sign that he is stressed.

“Is everything alright?” Will asks.

“Just arrangements for the funeral. Robertus knew he would be gone soon and had everything ready for when he passed. The ceremony will be later today.” Hannibal glances over at Will’s current outfit—his black suit, black tie, and a new pair of black leather oxfords—with a

critical eye. “Your suit is not ideal, but it will have to do. There’s no time to get something tailored now.”

Will only just manages to contain his eye roll. “I’m better dressed than most people on this planet. I think it will be fine.”

“You are a Lecter now, Will. You will always be better dressed than most people on this planet. That is still no excuse for wearing anything less than the best.”

Will sighs and smiles, content to let Hannibal fuss over his clothing, so lost over this man that any attention given to him is welcome.

Hannibal attends various meetings throughout the rest of the day, Will always firmly glued to his side. They only part when Hannibal checks that his uncle’s body is ready for transport, and even this short separation is met with longing and resistance from both sides.

The ride to the cemetery is quick. Robertus chose to be buried in the churchyard of a local parish, not wishing to be moved to be buried in his home country of Lithuania. Hannibal holds Will’s hand the entire drive there, and Will leans into the touch, soaking up the attention like a thirsty plant given its first sip of water in weeks.

The church is small but pretty, made of old cobblestone and worn wooden beams. Each row of the church is filled with mourners, and more people spill out of the back, swarming the little churchyard with various shades of black like a pack of ravens waiting for a feast.

“Did all of them know your uncle?” Will whispers to Hannibal. They are seated in the front of the chapel, and each time Will turns around, he is amazed at how many people have been able to squish into the room. Chiyoh and Lady Murasaki sit on the row opposite theirs, both with tears in their eyes, though Will thinks Chiyoh is mourning more her lost relationship with Hannibal than Robertus.

“Not all of them, no. But he was a public figure as well as one of the wealthiest men in the country. People want to be seen showing their sympathies, whether true or not.”

Will huffs, and Hannibal sends him his own amused smile.

The rest of the ceremony passes quickly, and Hannibal and Will drive back to the estate in silence. Once at the manor, Will notices that they are not alone. There are dozens of camera crews outside the main entrance, each filled with loud reporters and bright lights.

“What are they doing here?” Will asks, drawing into himself at the sight of so many cameras and people.

“As I mentioned before, the Lecter household is a prominent one. For someone like my uncle to pass will be a great change that will affect people all around the world. I suppose it is news-worthy to some.”

Will squirms, rubbing his hands over his black pants and wishing he were already inside, preferably wearing a flannel top (or nothing at all, if Hannibal were with him).

“Do not worry, Mylimasis. None of them will get close to you. I will make sure of it.”

There is an edge to Hannibal’s tone, a violence that makes Will shudder with arousal.

Their car pulls around the circular gravel drive, avoiding the various camera crews and microphones, and stops in front of the stone steps leading up to the front door. Hannibal says a few rapid-fire sentences in French to the driver (in which Will only understands a handful of words) before the driver gets out and walks to their door. He opens it, shielding them from the cameras as much as he is able, and continues to shield them as Hannibal guides Will up the front steps, his hand never leaving Will’s back.

Each of the reporters is shouting, and Will hears more than just French in the mix. There is English, German, Japanese, and is that *Russian*? Why are so many people outside of Hannibal’s newly-acquired estate? Reporters from all over the world are pointing their cameras at Will, and he feels dizzy-headed, faint from the constant attention. He huddles beneath Hannibal’s jacket, more than happy when they finally reach the front door.

Once inside, the driver shuts the door behind them and gives Hannibal a ridiculous bow, hat nearly tipping off his balding head.

“Thank you,” Will tells him, and the driver gives him a large smile before walking back out into the fray.

Lady Murasaki and Chiyoh follow not far behind, and Chiyoh immediately exits the foyer as soon as she walks inside, clearly taking Hannibal’s instructions from last night to heart. Lady Murasaki is not so quick to leave. She frowns at Will, thin lips dipping and wrinkling her otherwise smooth, perfect skin. Will frowns back, unsure why she is directing such animosity towards him and not even close to eager to find out.

“Come,” Hannibal murmurs into his ear. “Ignore her.”

As they begin to leave, Lady Murasaki calls out, “Wait! A moment, please.”

Hannibal pauses, hand still resting against Will’s back, before slowly turning to face his aunt. Will turns to, staring down at his shiny black shoes rather than Lady Murasaki’s face.

“Yes?” Hannibal asks, and Will is sure that there are arctic winds warmer than Hannibal’s tone.

“I wanted to…apologize for what occurred yesterday. It was not my intention for…Will to be hurt.” Each word is drawn out like a tortured confession, the words stilted and insincere. Will is sure that Hannibal, even without Will’s empathy disorder, will be able to tell just how true Murasaki’s apology is.

“And yet he was hurt,” Hannibal replies. If possible, his voice is even cooler than before. “I will not stand for such treatment. Will deserves nothing but respect from each person in this house, and that is exactly what he will get.”

“And how has he *earned* this respect?” Murasaki sneers. “By sleeping with his adopted father? I see the way you look at him. I see the mark upon his neck. Do not think you can hide this from me.”

“I would never wish to. Will is mine in every sense of the word. The matter of his adoption was merely a formality.”

“And do others share your nonchalance?”

“I do not care what others think, nor should you. You certainly didn’t care about my age or relationship to you when you sought me out after my adoption.”

Will lifts his eyes, watching as Lady Murasaki reels back as though slapped.

“You…” she stops, sucks in a stuttering breath. “*Ana ta ha shi ni sonoyo una kotoba o iu yuuki ga ari masu.*”

Hannibal is quick to reply. “*Watashitachi no shiseikatsu ha tanni sore desu: puraibeto. Watashitachi o anshin sa se te ku dasai.*”

Murasaki sneers one final time before leaving, the scent of her expensive perfume waving like a flag behind her, the only sign that she was ever in the room.

Hannibal sighs and rubs his hand along Will’s back. “It seems I must keep apologizing to you for other’s behavior, my dear Will.”

“Don’t,” Will says. “You shouldn’t apologize for something that is out of your control. Your aunt makes her own decisions for what she says and does. You can’t control that.”

Hannibal shakes his head, eyes shining with wonder. “You are wise beyond your years. Come, let us pack. The sooner we do, the sooner we can leave this estate and the unwanted company it brings.”

It doesn’t take long for their belongings to be packed up. They only brought a few days’ worth of clothing and toiletries. Hannibal grabs a few items from his old bedroom as well as a few documents from the study before they both head to the back of the house to wait for their driver. The car picks them up near the stables, and Will says a fond farewell to each of the dogs before climbing into the car, resting his head on Hannibal’s firm shoulder and staring out at the starry night sky.

They make it back to the airstrip quickly, only a few murmured words passing between them during the ride. The plane is waiting for them on the asphalt, a different flight attendant and pilot helping to load their luggage aboard the plane as they walk up the metal ramp and into the large room inside. Once they are settled onto one of the white leather couches, Will turns to Hannibal and asks (with a voice small and meek), “Is what we’re doing wrong? I mean the fact that we are having sex.”

Hannibal tilts his head, considering. “I suppose that depends on who you ask. In Japan, where Chiyoh and Lady Murasaki are from, the age of consent is thirteen. In Baltimore, it is sixteen.

Each person has their own idea of what age it is and isn't appropriate to have a sexual relationship. As for the nature of our relationship, technically I am considered your father, though the love I feel for you is certainly not familial in nature." Hannibal turns and looks at him, maroon eyes boring into his own, and asks, "Do you feel that what we are doing is wrong?"

Will doesn't even have to think before he replies, "No. I've experienced a lot of wrong, bad things in my life. This isn't one of them."

"Then you have your answer," Hannibal says. He leans down and presses a kiss against Will's forehead, touch so gentle that Will nearly cries.

Will falls asleep not long after, soothed by Hannibal's touch and his words of love that pour from his mouth and land on Will's ears like dew drops from a blooming flower. It seems as though a dream when Hannibal lifts him up and carries him to a familiar car. Will is still asleep by the time they return home, Hannibal's honeyed words of love still pouring over his ears. It is to these words that eventually falls into a deep, restful sleep.

And it is to these words of love that he wakes, Hannibal's face one of angelic beauty next to his in the bed.

"Wake up, Mylimasis. I have news."

Chapter End Notes

Translations (according to the internet):

D'accord. Nous y serons bientôt: All right. We will be there soon.

Ana ta ha shi ni sonoyo una kotoba o iu yuuki ga ari masu: You dare to say such words to me.

Watashitachi no shiseikatsu ha tanni sore desu: puraibeto. Watashitachi o anshin sa se te ku dasai: Our private life is simply that: private. Leave us in peace.

The Forbidden Fruit

Chapter Summary

Hannibal receives an intriguing message. He and Will come to an understanding.

Hannibal peers into Will's sleep-clouded eyes, the brilliant blue hazy and unaware. When Will flutters his eyes as if to shut them again, Hannibal gently shakes Will's shoulders and murmurs, "Darling, I know it is early. But this is an important matter that should be dealt with sooner rather than later."

Hannibal had debated whether to wake Will at all. This was not a conversation he wanted to have (ever), but if Hannibal did not tell Will about the message now, and the boy found out later…Hannibal did not want to upset Will, not like this. No, honesty was the best course of action to take in the current situation.

"Wha' time is it?" Will mumbles, burying his face into Hannibal's chest. A tiny puddle of drool seeps from the corners of Will's mouth onto Hannibal's sleep shirt, creating a small damp spot in the fabric near his nipple. Hannibal pushes his chest further against Will's face, encouraging the boy to take comfort in him.

"Nine o'clock in the morning," Hannibal replies, running a hand through Will's mussed curls. "We've only been in bed for a few hours since our flight."

"News?" Will asks.

"Yes, darling. I have received a communication from someone claiming to be your mother."

All at once, Will is wide awake. He springs up from where he was nuzzling Hannibal's pectoral and slips out of the bed, falling to the bedroom floor in a pile of flailing limbs and high-pitched squeals.

"Mother?" he coughs out, standing up as though nothing has happened. He straightens his pajama top and bites on his bottom lip hard enough to draw blood. The scent of copper mixes in the room with the smell of Will's surprise (his hurt). "What? How?"

Hannibal sighs and slips out of the warm covers, walking around the bed to stand beside Will, hands ready to catch the boy in case Will decides to take another tumble. "I received a message on my work phone from a woman who claims to be your mother. She said she saw you on the news last night outside of my estate in France and instantly recognized you."

Will's face twists, contorts, a thousand different emotions flitting across his features in the span of a single second. He eventually settles somewhere between confusion and disbelief,

small nose scrunched up. “Recognize me? But she left right after I was born. How would she even know what I look like?”

“She says you look uncannily similar to your progenitor. I admit, there is some truth to her words. You have the same curly hair. The same blue eyes. The same slight frame.”

Will bites his bottom lip once more, tugs on the bottom of his ear. Hannibal leans down and licks the blood from his lip, lapping it away as if to draw out the pain that has inflicted Will’s being at this news. Will melts into the touch, leaning against Hannibal for support which Hannibal is all-too happy to provide.

“What should I do?” Will whispers, shoving his face into Hannibal’s chest. “How do we make sure she’s really my…mom?”

“I will ask her to take a DNA test. Since I already have a sample of your DNA, it is a simple matter of sending in her collected sample to test for similarities. Maternity tests are not as common as paternity, but they are no less effective.”

Will’s entire body shudders, and he sinks further into Hannibal’s embrace, leaning his entire weight against Hannibal’s abdomen. “I don’t understand. She left. She didn’t want me. Why is she reaching out now?”

Hannibal pets Will’s hair, twining his finger around a curl and then watching it spring back into place. “I think you already know the answer to that, darling.”

Will snarls and pushes away, fury taking the place of confusion. “It’s so stupid!” He throws his fists into the air, pacing the room like a trapped animal in search of its captor. “She can’t just expect to show up now that I have…money and think I will want to see her. That’s so ridiculous! You can give her the damn DNA test if you want, but I *never* want to see her. Ever.”

Hannibal nods his head, not attempting to placate or soothe Will in any way. The feelings Will is experiencing are all normal and should be allowed to flow rather than be kept bottled up inside. “Of course. Whatever you wish. We do not need to take this message seriously at all. It is a simple matter of blocking the number and then moving along with our lives as though the interruption never occurred.”

Will stops his pacing and glances over his shoulder at Hannibal. “Really? You would let this go without seeing if she’s really my mom?”

“If that is what you truly desire. I will not lie to you, I am...deeply interested in finding out whether this woman’s claim is valid. However, I realize how upsetting this entire situation is, and I do not wish to cause you any further duress.”

Will sighs, all of the fight draining from his body. “Yeah, well, I think no matter what choice I make I’ll end up upset.” Will tugs on his ear once more, fingers fluttering in the pale morning light. “Fine. Send the test. Just don’t tell me what it says.”

Hannibal walks across the room and brings Will to his chest like he had before, pressing the boy's face into his shirt. He runs a soothing hand along the back of Will's head and murmurs to him in Lithuanian, telling Will how proud he is, how much he loves him, how he would burn the entire world for a mere second more in the boy's presence.

They return to the bed, and Hannibal brings out his work phone, typing out a message to this mystery woman.

I will send you a DNA test to verify the accuracy of your claim. Until the results have been processed, please do not contact me again.

With that settled, Hannibal tucks his body around Will's and attempts to fall back asleep, though it's a fruitless endeavor. His mind churns over the possibilities presented by this new variable, and by the time ten o'clock rolls around, and he has still not fallen back asleep, Hannibal resigns himself to a fatigued day. He slips back out of the bed and showers, going downstairs to prepare a breakfast for himself and Will, checking the contents of his freezer and noting (not for the first time) how empty his stores of meat have become.

Will does not bring up the message when he wakes, and Hannibal allows the boy his space. They are both still tired from their journey, though Hannibal convinces Will to accompany him on a walk along the harbor. The air is frigid, only slightly warmed by the nearby sea, and both of them breathe in the salt-tinged wind with sighs of relief.

The next day, Hannibal returns to work with Bedelia. She expresses her condolences again, inquiring about Robertus's funeral and whether Hannibal will need to take more time off to grieve. He assures her that he is fine, the funeral went as smoothly as it could given how quickly it occurred, and he is happy to be back to his regular schedule.

The rest of the week also passes in relative peace. Will begins studying French in earnest, desperate to become fluent (and get rid of his Creole accent that Hannibal finds unbearably adorable) before their next trip to France. Will also begins to experiment in the kitchen when Hannibal is away. On Wednesday, Hannibal returns home to find Will putting the finishing touches on a squash soup. Though it has far too much salt, and the consistency is more watery than Hannibal would prefer, he eats each drop with avid enthusiasm and then takes Will on the dining room table (using olive oil as makeshift lubricant when neither of them can stand to part from the other) at the look of love and pride blossoming in his boy's eyes. On Friday, Will attempts to make quiche, but the crust ends up burning in the oven, and Hannibal consoles his darling with cooed words and gentle touches before making them both a dinner of cooked trout, lemongrass risotto, and sautéed asparagus.

On Saturday, the first day of December, the rest of Will's new wardrobe is finally delivered. There are a litany of new suits, coats, and a few surprises that Hannibal stows away for Christmas.

"Would you like to go out tonight?" Hannibal asks, drying the plate in his hands and setting it into the cabinet. "We could see another show at the opera or have dinner somewhere new. It is up to you, darling."

Will frowns and pauses, hands squishing the sponge he is using to wash his plate from breakfast. “Do you want to go out?” he asks. He finishes washing the plate and hands it to Hannibal, eyes remaining firmly locked onto the sink.

Hannibal dries the plate, puts it away, and folds his arms over his chest. “I have no preference either way.”

Will’s frown only deepens. “You decide. I don’t care.”

Hannibal lifts an eyebrow and walks over to one of the bar stools, pulling it out and sitting down in one graceful movement. “I think you do care, Will. I think you simply don’t wish to disappoint me.” A ridiculous notion, one that Hannibal will quickly dissuade the boy of. Will could decide he never wanted to leave the house again and Hannibal would not be disappointed in him (though he would convince Will that such a thought was without merit as his boy deserved to see the world, and the world him). “Why do you think you will disappoint me?”

“I’m not *like* you Hannibal,” Will says, slamming his hands onto the countertop. His voice is rough. Upset. Desperate. “I don’t like going out in fancy suits and eating fancy food. I don’t like talking to other people, or socializing, or parading around like a friggin’ peacock. I just want to be alone. With you.” Tears flood Will’s eyes, sharp waves in a cerulean sea. “And I know you do. Like those things. So yeah, you decide. Because either way I’m going to disappoint you.”

Hannibal breathes in the scent of Will’s unhappiness, sharp and tangy like a ripened tamarind. Hannibal stores the smell of it into a blue glass bottle and places it next to the framed images of Will hanging in his Mind Palace. He looks at Will—his lovely, emotive boy—and sighs. “Do you trust me, Will?”

Will’s head rears back, surprised. He takes a step away from the sink (toward Hannibal). “Yeah. Why?”

“Come with me, please.” Hannibal turns, not looking to see if Will is following behind, and makes his way up the staircase. He walks into their bedroom and sits on the settee at the foot of the bed, pleased when Will walks in only a moment later.

“Why are we in here?” Will asks, slightly petulant. He crosses his arms over his chest. “Are you mad at me?”

“Of course not, darling. I merely realized a grave error I have made.” Hannibal stands and walks over to where Will is waiting in the doorway, his toes scrunched up on the hardwood floors. “If you think that there is *anything* more important than you, anyone whose face I would rather see than your own, any voice I would rather hear than yours, then you are sorely mistaken. There is nothing more important in this world to me than you, Will, especially not something as trivial as a ‘fancy’ dinner or a night out at the opera. I want you to be happy. I want you to be so full of joy that it bursts from your veins and floods the room each time you enter the door. Do you understand, Mylimasis?”

The tears are no longer waves in Will's blue eyes; they are torrents, tsunamis, flooding from his lids and pouring down his radiant cheeks in tantalizing lines of salt-slick water. Will chokes out a wet laugh and leans his forehead into Hannibal's abdomen, and Hannibal can feel the warmth pouring off of Will even through the layers of his undershirt, button-down, and waistcoat.

"Do you understand?" Hannibal asks again, this time in a whisper.

"Yes," Will says. His voice trembles. "I understand."

"Good. Now come over here. I want to try something with you." Hannibal guides Will over to their bed and lays the boy down so that his head is resting on the pillows and his feet are pointed toward the settee. "Remember your word."

"Red," Will answers. "And you can say it too."

Hannibal smiles, besotted, and nods his head. "Wait just so. I will return in a moment." Hannibal walks into his closet and grabs a silk scarf, a deep burgundy cloth that will look simply delectable against Will's pale flesh. Hannibal walks back to the bed and glances down at Will—his flushed cheeks, his red-rimmed blue eyes, his lean limbs that slowly fill out more and more each day—before leaning over and wrapping the scarf around Will's eyes. He ties the scarf on the side of Will's head, a small knot over the boy's ear.

"Is that comfortable?" Hannibal asks, running a finger over the silky fabric.

"Yeah," Will chokes out. Arousal thrums beneath the boy's skin, flowing through his veins and pulsing beneath his hyoid. Hannibal leans down and licks a long, wet stripe up the side of Will's neck, tasting the spicy arousal on his tongue. Will jerks at the sudden touch, hands flailing as they search for something to hold on to without being able to see.

"Here," Hannibal says, gently grabbing Will's uninjured wrist in his hand. He places it on the headboard and wraps Will's fingers around one of the posts. "Hold on to this, please."

Will shudders at the order. He grips the bedpost with a white-knuckled grip, his injured wrist remaining firmly by his side. Hannibal kneels back, straddling Will's trim waist, and brushes his lips over the ring of bruises, inordinately incensed that the mottled green and yellow fingerprints around Will's skin were caused by hands other than his own. With one last glancing kiss, Hannibal leans back from the bed and stands in front of the settee, staring at Will's lovely prone form as he removes his clothing. Each item is folded and placed on the settee. With each movement, each ruffle of clothing or scrape of fabric against his skin, Will turns his head to listen, thin neck twisting back and forth as if to escape the scarf tied securely over his eyes.

When Hannibal is completely nude, he kneels back on the bed and begins divesting Will of his clothing. First the boy's flannel top—brand-new and already well-loved, the fabric a deep red that Will immediately took to—then his crisp undershirt. His pants are pulled off with long caresses and gratuitous touches that cause Will's lithe legs to tremble and shake. Finally, Hannibal removes the boy's boxers, enamored at the sight of Will's tiny cock sticking straight into the air, a bead of precum already sitting on the covered head.

Unable to help himself, Hannibal leans down and licks the bead of precum from the boy's slit, laving the head with a few more broad strokes of his tongue before pushing himself away to reach the lubricant from inside the nightstand. At the gentle *snick* of the bottle being opened, Will's chest begins to rise and fall in earnest, each breath a gulping, desperate sound as if the oxygen were being clawed from the air and thrust into Will's lungs with a cruel hand.

"I know that words are not always adequate to properly get a point across." As he is speaking, Hannibal trails one of his hands along Will's stomach, watching as goosebumps erupt over the exposed flesh. Will's entire abdomen spasms as the boy struggles to breathe. Hannibal smirks and continues, "So instead of only speaking words, I intend to *show* you just how enthralled I am merely by being in your presence. You are mine, Will, utterly and completely, and you could never disappoint me simply by having different tastes than mine. It is in our differences that the two of us become complete."

Will huffs out a low groan. "How are you going to show me?"

Hannibal's smirk widens. He wishes, for only a brief moment, that Will's eyes were uncovered, and he could see the hazy swirls of lust in the boy's blue eyes, could see Will's pupils dilate with each word, each touch. However, this entire interaction is about *showing* Will that Hannibal is his and his alone, and the blindfold will only increase Will's physical stimulation.

"I intend to show you my love, one orgasm at a time. I will wring out every drop of pleasure I can from your perfect body, and when you feel that there is nothing left in you to give, I shall bring you to peak one last time and watch as you collapse into my arms, sated at last."

Will keens, hips bucking up into the air, and Hannibal swoops down and sucks Will into his mouth. Will's small cock is the perfect morsel, a delectable mouthful that Hannibal can suck on with ease. He slurps the erection until it nuzzles the roof of his mouth, running his tongue along the underside and then up to the drooling tip.

Will can't help but thrust into Hannibal's mouth, and Hannibal lets him, content to let Will take his pleasure.

Hannibal continues to suck on Will's cock, running a light hand along Will's tight sack and then down to his taint. When Hannibal presses the pad of his finger against Will's hole, Will comes with a high-pitched whine, spilling his bitter seed into Hannibal's waiting mouth. Hannibal drinks it down with vigor, lapping at the head to catch any remaining spend before releasing Will's drained cock from his mouth with a soft *pop*.

"Oh my god…" Will says, canting his hips into the air once more. "S'good."

"I am glad to hear it, darling." Hannibal reaches over to the opened bottle of lubricant and generously coats the fingers of his right hand. He trails his left hand over Will's soft thigh, marveling at how firm they've gotten these past few months, the silky skin filling out with plush fat and hard muscle. "Look how beautiful you're becoming," Hannibal murmurs. "Each day I marvel that such an alluring creature has made its way into my bed. Into my heart."

Will whines again, turned on as much by Hannibal's touch as by his praise.

Hannibal leans down and bites at Will's inner thigh, teeth digging into the delicate flesh. He sucks at the bite mark, drawing the blood up from underneath the skin until the flesh is reddened and bruising. With one last bite, Hannibal licks at the mark and then moves further down until he's facing Will's rapidly-swelling erection.

"So hard for me, my love," Hannibal coos, running a light finger over the wet head. He nuzzles the adorable cock before licking down to Will's balls, drawing one into his mouth and sucking it. Will twitches on the bed, knees rising up so that his feet are firmly planted on the mattress, Hannibal locked in-between his thighs. Hannibal can feel the heat emanating from Will's legs, surrounding him on both sides.

Hannibal lets go of Will's sack, blowing air onto the moistened flesh, before drawing the other ball into his mouth. He sucks on it, running his tongue along the bulging organ, and then lets this one go as well.

Finally, Hannibal licks his way down Will's taint. He savors the musky, salty flavor of Will's skin, unsullied by chemicals or any other taste except for *Will*. He laps at Will's perineum, licking away the beads of sweat that have collected under the boy's scrotum, and then leans down to place a gentle kiss over Will's hole.

This small action seems to unlock something in Will. The boy gasps and begins babbling, each word desperate and airy, words released into the room like the fluttering wings of a trapped moth. "Please, Hannibal. I'm so empty inside. Need you in me. Your fingers. Your tongue. Your cock. Anything. Just *please* don't leave me empty."

Not even the most god-fearing saint could refuse such a plea. With a growl, Hannibal responds, "Oh darling, of course I won't leave you empty."

Hannibal immediately shoves his tongue into Will's pink, wrinkled hole, spearing the tip of his tongue inside so that he is barely breaching Will. The boy is molten hot around Hannibal, sucking on him as if to try and pull him deeper.

Will mewls, writhing at the intrusion. His legs quiver on either side of Hannibal's head, heat radiating from the boy's flushed skin. Hannibal reaches around and grabs the outside of both of Will's thighs, drawing Will's pelvis up so his head doesn't have to lean down as far. Hannibal removes his tongue from Will's puckering hole and then begins to lap at the skin, broad strokes that go from behind Will's hole all the way to the base of his scrotum.

Will bucks in Hannibal's grip, hand releasing the headboard and latching onto Hannibal's hair instead. Hannibal savors the tight hold, the sparks of pain that dance along his spine as he continues licking into Will.

When Will's hole is sufficiently lax, Hannibal lets go of the boy's smooth thigh with his right hand and reaches down, piercing the boy with his index finger. Will whines and rolls his hips so that the finger breaches him all the way past the second knuckle.

“So desperate for me, Mylimasis,” Hannibal says. “How did you ever survive without me to fill you up? You must have been so empty, burdened with an ache that could never be satisfied.” As Hannibal is speaking, he begins pumping his finger in and out of Will, purposely steering clear of the boy’s prostate. “You don’t have to be empty anymore, darling. Not with me.”

Hannibal violently shoves a second finger in alongside the first, not allowing Will time to relax before scissoring them open. He brushes Will’s prostate, and Will’s grip on his hair turns to delicious agony, pain rolling from Hannibal’s scalp all the way down to his spine.

Hannibal leans back down and adds his tongue to Will’s hole. He spreads the puckering ring of flesh with his fingers and then licks inside, nearly able to touch Will’s prostate with his tongue alone.

When Will is squirming and writhing on the bed, Hannibal pulls back and wipes at his wet face, lube and saliva mixing together to coat his lips. Will whines at the loss, head tilting up to question why Hannibal has stopped, unable to see anything through the thick material of the scarf.

“I want you to come from my fingers, Will. Can you do that for me?”

Will groans. “Yes. S’close already.” His voice is slurred, heavy, flowing over Hannibal’s ears like molasses.

“Good boy.” Hannibal doesn’t miss the way Will’s entire body shudders at the praise, hole tightening around where Hannibal’s fingers are still buried inside. He begins scissoring them again, making sure to caress Will’s swollen prostate with each movement. When Will begins to shake, close to the brink of orgasm, Hannibal rubs against the gland without mercy, fingers massaging the soft flesh with unnerving accuracy until Will’s entire body is vibrating, humming with pleasure so intense it cannot sit still.

“Oh god!” Will cries out, head thrown back against the pillows as he comes once more. His ejaculation is less this time, dribbling out from the head of his cock in small beads of white.

“Good boy,” Hannibal coos again, removing his fingers from Will’s vise-like hole. He rubs his hand over his own engorged cock, spreading the remaining lubricant as well as Will’s bodily fluids over his erection. Without giving Will a chance to breathe, to come down from the crest of pleasure, Hannibal shoves his cock inside of the boy, spearing him in one long, sure thrust.

“*Ah*!” Will jerks back from the intrusion, but Hannibal is still holding onto his thigh with one hand, forcing him to bear down on Hannibal’s substantial girth.

And oh, Hannibal will never get used to this. The feel of Will, silky and warm and *so tight* it is almost painful. His small hole stretched to the limits around Hannibal’s large cock, gripping his tender flesh, embracing it as to make it a part of him.

“*Will*,” Hannibal breathes out, pulling back his hips and then thrusting inside once more. Will’s insides flutter around his cock, kissing the tip of his head and sucking him further in

until Hannibal's pelvis is kissing Will's plush, pert bottom. "My darling. My love. So good for me."

Will is utterly incoherent, reduced to garbled moans and high-pitched whines. His body is completely lax, not a single muscle in use as Hannibal begins pistoning into his tight, wet heat. The force of Hannibal's thrusts push Will back into the mattress, and Hannibal shifts his grip on Will's thighs, forcing the boy's hips to tilt even further upwards. At this angle, Hannibal is (quite literally) pounding the boy into the mattress, each snap of his hips causing Will's body to shift deeper and deeper into the navy comforter.

"Feel how much I love you. You never need doubt my affection for you. This," and Hannibal punctuates his words with a deep, slow grind, "is the most important thing in my life. Us. Together. And no thing, nor any person, will ever come between that."

Hannibal adjusts his hips slightly, moving a bit to the right, and when he thrusts in this time Will's entire body spasms, feet flailing as Hannibal's cock nails Will's prostate again and again. Each rough smack of his pelvis against Will's body causes the boy to keen, loud whines that echo in the room and mix with the sound of the wet squelch of Hannibal's cock shoving in and out of the boy.

"Are you going to come again for me, darling?" Hannibal asks, breathless. His body is coated in sweat, muscles burning with the exertion of pounding into Will's tight heat over and over again.

Will moans and tries to nod, muscles in his neck so lax that he is barely able to move.

"Yes you are. You are going to come from my cock in your tight, hungry hole. Do you dream of this? Me, inside of you. Filling you up as no other has or will."

"Yes," Will cries out. "You fill me up so good."

Hannibal leans over and takes one of Will's nipples into his mouth, sucking hard on the tiny, red nub. His hips continue working into Will's tight ring, the tip of his cock grinding deep into Will's warm, welcoming body. Each thrust causes Will's nipple to stutter in the grip of his teeth, the skin becoming wet and swollen from Hannibal's consistent pressure.

Hannibal lets go of the abused nipple and trails kisses across Will's sweaty chest, reaching for the other nub with waiting teeth. Will whines at the contact, hole tightening around Hannibal's cock in the most delicious way, and Hannibal bites down. Hard.

Will's entire body spasms, and the boy moans, weak and quiet, as his third orgasm of the night takes him. There is almost no cum this time, only the tiniest hint of liquid dripping out of Will's purple-tinged cock, and the sight causes fire to lick across Hannibal's body.

"So good, darling," Hannibal says, voice breathless with the intensity of his thrusts. "That makes three. I think you have one orgasm left in you. I want you to come one more time."

Will shakes his head, voice slurring over a sentence that Hannibal cannot make out. Eventually, his trembling mouth makes out the words, "Can't. Can't come again."

“Of course you can. You have done so good for me. Been such a good boy.” Hannibal punctuates this statement by grinding the head of his cock against Will’s prostate, watching with wonder as Will’s mouth opens and not a single sound comes out, as if Hannibal has pushed all the air out of the boy’s lungs from the strength of his thrusts alone.

Despite Will’s denial, the boy’s tiny cock is slowly filling out once more. The head is soaked from his previous orgasms, his paltry pubic hair wet with sweat and drying cum. Hannibal lets go of one of Will’s thighs and reaches down, grabbing the adorable erection in his fist and rubbing it up and down, coordinating the pounding of his hips with the way he twists his hand around Will’s shaft.

“S’too much,” Will groans. His body is shiny with sweat, skin glowing like a burning piece of coal. Hannibal leans down and licks a stripe along the boy’s trembling abdomen, moaning at the taste of salt against the boy’s sweet skin.

“One more. One more darling, and then you can rest.”

Will shakes his head back and forth, curls cascading over the silk scarf and curling around his ears. “No. Can’t.”

“Yes you can. You are my perfect boy. My wild, sweet William. I know you want to make me proud. To show me how good you can be.”

Will’s cock dribbles out a pitiful amount of precum at the praise, and Hannibal is surprised the boy has anything left in him to give. It only spurns Hannibal on, and he picks up the pace once more, hips slapping against Will’s ass with a brutality that should have hurt the small boy but only caused him to moan and curse, writhing around the pillow as if to escape the endless onslaught of pleasure.

Hannibal feels his own orgasm nearing. It curls at the base of his spine, heat flickering up his back and then spreading to every limb of his body. He grips Will’s cock and twists his hand, slamming into the boy with a single, powerful thrust.

They both orgasm at the same time.

Will’s cock spurts a tiny dribble of cum, barely a drop, before the boy collapses onto the bed, utterly spent. Hannibal groans and spills into Will’s puckering hole, enchanted with how *wet* the boy is now that he is filled with Hannibal’s seed. He gives the boy a few last lazy thrusts before pulling all the way out, watching as his spend trickles over the boy’s pulsating hole and lands on the comforter below.

Hannibal reaches down and swipes his seed up onto trembling fingers. He leans over and places his fingertips against Will’s swollen lips, insensibly aroused as Will’s pink tongue darts out and laps up the given seed as if it were a gift. When Hannibal’s fingertips are clean and free of his spend, Will licks his lips a final time before slumping against the pillows, his breathing evening out as the last of his orgasm wracks his body.

“So good for me,” Hannibal coos, reaching down to undo the scarf. Will blinks up at him with bleary eyes, smiling once he is able to see Hannibal’s face.

Hannibal melts at the sight, leaning down to press a gentle kiss against Will's sweaty forehead, this touch so different from the violent pounding of his hips only moments ago.

Eventually, the sweat and cum on both of their skins begins to dry and become tacky. Hannibal sighs and lifts Will's loose body into his arms. He takes the both of them into the en suite bathroom, turning on the faucet for the bath and holding Will in his arms until the water has risen a sufficient amount. Hannibal slides into the bath first, then carries Will inside, placing the boy's back against his chest.

With delicate touches, Hannibal washes Will's body, mindful of the injury on Will's wrist. He lathers soap along Will's soft skin, luxuriating in the feel of it beneath his fingertips as they both sit in silence. When Will is clean, Hannibal presses a kiss into the boy's sweaty curls and leans back against the tub, content to close his eyes and simply relax.

Hannibal thinks, as he's resting there with his boy, that he has never been more grateful for the course his life has taken. There were times—when he was still a child, when Mischa's death was still fresh in his mind, when he was starving and struggling to survive inside of the orphanage—that he wished he had never been born. That his parents had never given birth to him or Mischa so that both of their pain and agony could have been avoided.

But this…this makes all of the agony worth it. Every pang inside of his empty stomach, every lash on his back from cruel masters, every lonely day spent waiting, wondering if there was more to life than his endless suffering. The answer was clear and simple: there was more to life. And the key to it was the perfect boy in his arms and the flourishing vines of love curling around his heart.

Will paces the floor of Hannibal's office, feet wearing a familiar path in the plush Persian rug. The fire crackles near him, the sound comforting but not enough to tame Will's raging anxiety. Through the window, the noon-day sun is still wan, hidden behind winter clouds and a layer of smog from the nearby city.

Will can't seem to wrap his head around the fact that someone claiming to be his mother has contacted Hannibal. Someone who had seen him on the news—and the thought of Will's face being plastered on TVs all over the globe is enough to send him spiraling into another round of anxiety—and then found Hannibal's work number. Someone who wants to be a part of Will's life after abandoning him as a child.

With a snarl, Will slams himself down on the piano bench, instantly regretting it when a deep, throbbing pain spreads from his ass. The pain turns to arousal in his gut, and Will sighs, ignoring his half-hard cock as he begins to meander his hands over the piano keys, each note he plays another thought echoing inside of his brain.

Why? Why now?

Of course, Will knows why.

Money. It all comes back to money. His father didn't have any, so his mother left. Hannibal has lots, so his mother is trying to return.

Will slams his hands over the keys, a cacophony of notes blaring into the empty office. He glances over at Hannibal's desk where two identical white envelopes sit side by side. He looks back down at the piano keys.

He gets up from the bench.

With trembling legs, Will forces himself to walk over to Hannibal's desk.

Hannibal—knowing damn well that Will would not be able to resist—had placed the envelopes there this morning with a murmured explanation that these were the DNA test results for both Will and the woman claiming to be his mother.

Hannibal had reassured Will multiple times before leaving for work that Will was under no obligation to look at the results. That Hannibal would support his decision either way. That Hannibal was here for Will, no matter what.

And Will, while he appreciated the sentiment, was sure that Hannibal used to be more… subtle in his manipulations. Of *course* Hannibal wanted Will to see the results. Why else would he place them so prominently on his desk as if displaying a particularly rare work of art, the crisp white paper of both envelopes as dazzling as any painting in the Louvre.

Will bites his lip, hovers at the edge of the desk. His hands are poised over both unopened envelopes, fingers trembling and pale.

It doesn't matter. Not really. Even if it *is* his mother reaching out, that doesn't mean Will has to meet her. That she had to become a part of his life (a life which is finally happy, which is finally full of love and joy rather than an aching loneliness that hurts even more than the hunger pangs in his empty stomach).

Steeling himself, Will reaches for the nearest envelope and easily slices it open with the letter opener that Hannibal just *happens* to have sitting nearby. Really, the man could not be any more obvious. It almost makes Will smile, knowing that this is Hannibal's way of begging. The man is far too proud to actually beg, so instead he makes it impossible for Will to say no. For Will to do anything other than what Hannibal wants.

It makes it easier for Will to open the letter when he imagines Hannibal's hand on top of his own, broad palm guiding his movements as he reaches inside and draws out the thick stack of papers. With a trembling sigh, Will glances down at the words, attempting to decipher what they mean.

The papers are his own DNA test results, and they are…complicated. Endless lines that speak of genomes and alleles and a whole bunch of other biological terms that Will can't decipher. It's almost disappointing, the crisp black-and-white letters doing nothing to satiate his growing curiosity.

Will sets aside his DNA results and reaches for the next envelope, this time with a slightly steadier hand. With a quick slice, he glides the letter opener underneath the seal and grabs the paper inside, this time only a single sheet.

The words on this paper are much easier to understand.

Based on testing results obtained from analysis of the DNA loci listed, the probability of maternity is 99.998%.

Will lets out a cry and drops the paper as if burned, watching with blurred eyes as it falls to the floor and lands on the rug with a soft *whoosh*, far too quiet for the impact it has in Will's mind, the words looming large and stark in his brain.

99% probability.

His mother.

Will collapses to the ground and wraps his arms around his knees. He begins rocking back and forth, toes curling into the rug as if to anchor him to the ground. His breathing is erratic, heart rate soaring well over what is normal for him. With each hurried inhale, his head gets lighter and lighter until it feels as though he will float away. Tears are streaming down his face, the taste of salt flooding his tongue like waves from the sea.

Will isn't sure how long he remains sitting on the rug. His rocking slows, subsides, but the trembling in his arms (in his chest, in his heart) never does. The light in the office changes as the sun makes its way across the sky, sunlight piercing through the heavy clouds before settling into a brilliant, blinding sunset. Will's arms lock up, muscles tense, and his legs and feet go completely numb. By the time Hannibal returns home, Will is no longer able to move, sore and numb and so fucking *tired* he feels it all the way down to his bones.

"Darling," Hannibal mutters, dropping his briefcase to the ground and immediately running to Will's side.

Will smells Hannibal's spicy cologne, the lingering musk of his unwashed skin, and allows himself a single, shuddering breath to draw in the combined scent, tasting it on his tongue like a powerful drug.

"Oh Will," Hannibal says, voice low, soothing. "How long have you been sitting here my love? Your hands and feet are like ice."

Hannibal reaches down and plucks Will up from the rug as if he weighs as much as a feather (as much as a single sheet of paper). Hannibal carries him over to the leather armchair and sits down, settling Will into his lap and placing Will's face so that it's buried in Hannibal's neck.

Will lets out a small, broken cry, finally able to move his locked muscles. He grips his arms around Hannibal's neck and pulls him closer, closer, until there's not a single molecule of space left between them.

Hannibal doesn't speak, merely runs his hands up and down Will's back, massaging the tense muscles at the base of his spine. Will melts into the warm, familiar touch. He molds his frame against Hannibal's, wondering how he ever went a day without this, the feel of Hannibal beneath him, the smell of Hannibal in his nose, the taste of Hannibal's pulse beneath his lips.

“Hannibal,” he breathes out, letting the word settle into Hannibal’s neck. “It’s her. My mom. The test came back positive.”

Hannibal tenses for the briefest moment—and for a man as controlled as Hannibal, that might as well have been a shout—before relaxing once more. He grips the nape of Will’s neck as one might a kitten and pulls Will’s head back so that they are looking into one another’s eyes. Hannibal’s maroon eyes are blazing, blood dripping from his lids and spilling onto his cheeks. He looks positively murderous in the dying light of the fire, and Will can’t help the shiver of fear that runs up his spine.

It’s quickly followed by a shiver of arousal, but Will shoves that away.

“Are you sure?” he asks, tone icy-hot. “The DNA matched?”

“With a 99% probability. What am I going to do?” Will sobs again, a hiccup that sounds pathetic even to his own ears.

“You are going to do nothing that you do not wish, darling. If you want to forget the DNA test happened, that can be arranged. I will block her number, change my work cell, and set up a restraining order so she can never come within a hundred miles of you. If, however, you wish to meet—”

“No!” Will shouts. “No. Absolutely not. I’d rather *die*.”

Hannibal brushes a hand through his sweaty curls, cooing at him. “No, there is no need for that. I’ll have everything arranged. You will never need to think of the woman again. You are safe, here, with me. And that is how it shall remain.”

Will slumps against Hannibal’s chest, drawing in a long, shuddering breath. All the fight has left him, but the sour aftertaste of fear remains. Even with Hannibal’s connections, there is nothing to stop his mot—this woman from seeking them out. She knows Hannibal’s name. She looked up his practice. She knows where they live.

There is only one way for Will to ever be truly rid of her, and that is not something he is ready for. Not yet

With his face still buried against Hannibal’s chest, Will asks, “Are you ever going to get me my own chair near the fireplace?”

Hannibal hums, amused at the turn the conversation has taken. “I’ve considered the thought. But I much prefer holding you in my lap instead.”

Will shudders, holding as tightly to Hannibal as he possibly can. Never wanting to let go. Hannibal allows him the possessive grip, holding him back until Will’s stomach rumbles with an embarrassing groan.

Hannibal chuckles and takes Will into the kitchen, placing him on one of the countertops. Hannibal sees the lunch he prepared still sitting uneaten in the fridge and instantly begins working on dinner.

“Something carb-heavy,” Hannibal murmurs. “You need to recover your strength.”

Will shrugs, uncaring. “You’re the doctor.”

Hannibal nods his head, closing a cabinet with a sharp swing of his hips. “I am. And I am going to take good care of my boy.”

Will allows the words (the love, the possessiveness in Hannibal’s voice) to wash over him, bathing him in a warmth that starts in his chest and ends up all the way in his toes.

“I began seeing a new patient today,” Hannibal says. His keeps his tone soft as he moves about the kitchen, no doubt trying to distract Will from more unpleasant thoughts. Will allows the distraction, happy to focus on anything but that damned sheet of paper still lying on the office floor. “Do you remember Margot Verger?”

Will’s shoulders tense at the name. “Yeah, we saw her at the opera. Why is she the one in therapy? I think her brother might need it more.”

“A keen observation, Mylimasis. It was actually her brother that recommended she seek therapy in the first place. He thinks she requires a firm hand.”

“And is that what you’re giving her?” Will asks, tilting his neck so he can watch Hannibal light the stove. Hannibal sets a pot of water on to boil, placing a package of homemade pasta on the counter nearby. “A firm hand?”

“I think Margot is unequivocally in need of guidance. Whether that guidance is something I can provide remains to be seen.”

Hannibal grabs a few fresh vegetables from the fridge, face turning amused when Will makes a wild, gesturing motion towards the cutting board.

“I want to help,” Will says, ignoring how it sounds more like a whine. “It will distract me.”

“Very well. Start with the bell peppers. Remember, consistency is key.”

Will rolls his eyes, grabbing the knife from Hannibal’s outstretched hand and cutting into the first bell pepper with ease. “Yeah, yeah. I remember.”

Hannibal huffs from behind him and continues gathering ingredients. It takes around an hour for the meal to be finished—pasta with red pepper cream sauce and crumbled sausage (Will refrains from asking whose), topped with fresh basil picked from Hannibal’s flourishing herb garden. Each bite is, of course, so delicious that Will wants to moan around every forkful. He only lets one or two slip out, and the instantaneous reaction from Hannibal (the flush on his cheeks, the dilation of his pupils) is enough to have Will half-hard before dinner is over.

Hannibal takes him slowly that night, gentle rolls of his hips that send Will spiraling higher and higher until he crests with a high-pitched sigh, his climax more a release than an explosion.

The next day, Hannibal keeps Will out of the house from dawn until dusk. It's not until Will is halfway up the stairs to their room that evening that he realizes someone has been inside the house. It's a subtle thing, but there's a new smell in the air, a mixture of sawdust and sour sweat, and Will peers over his shoulder at Hannibal.

"Why were we gone all day?" he asks.

Hannibal shrugs, a graceful roll of his shoulders, and Will narrows his eyes.

Fine, if Hannibal wants to keep his secrets, Will will just have to find out on his own. As if reading his thoughts, Hannibal says, "Think nothing of it, dearest. We will have our fair share of guests in the next coming weeks. I plan to keep you away while they are here, so you mustn't worry about running into strangers."

Will scrunches up his nose, confused. Guests? Why would Hannibal have guests over only while they are gone from the house? And for several weeks? Will sniffs the air again, cheeks flushing when he realizes just how much like a dog he is acting. Still, the scent of sawdust lingers in the air, and Will realizes Hannibal must be making some sort of improvement to the house. But why does he not want Will to know about it? Surely a home improvement project has no need to be kept secret, right?

When Will is lying in bed that night, body firmly tucked into Hannibal's warm chest, he realizes why the next few weeks might be special: Christmas is coming.

Hannibal must be preparing some sort of gift for Will.

Will's stomach churns, nausea and anxiety rising in his throat like bile. Will has never had a real Christmas before, never celebrated it before. He isn't sure he knows how.

The closest Will has ever come to celebrating Christmas is when, in the fourth grade, he was actually in school during the month of December—a slow month for boat repairs, usually spent with his dad wandering the streets of some tiny town rather than putting Will in class. Will remembers tinny music through an old, rundown radio, cookies that tasted like maple syrup that crumbled in his mouth, and a short, scruffy tree set up in the corner of the classroom, decorated by handmade ornaments from each of the students.

Will can't imagine that Hannibal's Christmas is going to look the same.

It takes a long time for Will's brain to fall quiet, mind going in circles as he tries to picture a present worthy of Hannibal. After all the man has given to Will—including his heart—it seems only fair that Will finally give something back.

Will turns to face Hannibal, amazed that Hannibal does not wake at the movement. The man is such a light sleeper, no doubt a symptom of his childhood as well as his extracurricular activities. Will sighs and gazes at Hannibal's face, so beautiful in the moonlight, the shadows and darkness only enhancing his features.

Will's eyes caress Hannibal's dark hair, soft and silky as it spills out over his forehead. His sharp cheekbones jut from his olive skin, flushed with sleep. His lips are slightly parted, and

Will wants to lick against his defined cupid's bow, run his teeth along his plush lower lip. Hannibal's neck curves gently against the navy pillow case, comforter pulled up under his armpit. Will stares at Hannibal's thick, wiry chest hair, fingers itching with the urge to touch, to pull, to run against that coarse hair that is becoming more and more familiar to him with each passing day.

With a start, Will realizes he's hard. His cock throbs beneath his legs, pressing against his boxers, the only clothing Will has on. He reaches a hand down underneath the covers and grinds the heel of his palm against his cock, biting his lip to keep his moan inside.

Hannibal doesn't stir, breathing still deep and even as he lays next to Will.

With tiny, desperate movements, Will slips his hand into his boxers and begins to stroke his aching shaft. He pushes back his foreskin and runs a thumb over his wet slip, shivering at the sheer intensity of the pleasure. Will brings his thumb up to his lips and licks off the precum, delighted at the salty, bitter taste (not nearly as delectable as Hannibal's).

He slides his hand back into his boxers and begins to jerk off in earnest, hand quickly running up and down his cock. Will closes his eyes, imagining that it is Hannibal's hand on him rather than his own, Hannibal's taste on his tongue, Hannibal's cock inside his aching, empty hole. *God*, Will feels so empty.

When Will opens his eyes, it's to the sight of black-stained maroon staring into him, through him. Hannibal peers at him in the darkness, face only a few inches from his.

"Are you touching yourself, darling?" Hannibal asks, voice rough and raspy from sleep.

Will moans, moving his hand even faster. The room fills with the muffled, slick sounds of his palm sliding against his dripping cock. Will bucks into his palm, whimpering when his thumb grazes the sensitive glans at the tip of his erection.

"I'm so empty," he tells Hannibal. "Wish you were inside me. My mouth. My hole. I don't care."

Hannibal groans, eyes narrowing into tiny slits. "Are you so desperate for my cock, Mylimasis? Would you beg me for it until I filled you up? Cry such pretty tears for me until I soothed the empty ache inside of you?" His warm breath fans over Will's face, and Will leans closer so that they are both laying on the same pillow, nosing at Hannibal's neck and drinking in his scent.

"I never used to ache like this before," he whines. He reaches his hand lower, lower, brushing two of his fingers over his tight ring of muscle.

Hannibal gets up, broad form looming over Will and darkening Will's vision. "I must taste you."

Will nods, happy to have Hannibal's mouth on him in any way possible.

Hannibal throws back the blanket, exposing where Will is still working his cock, thrusting himself into his waiting palm. Hannibal growls and then does something odd.

He flips himself so that he is laying on his side, mouth only a few inches from Will's leaking cock. Hannibal's own growing erection rests just beneath the pillow Will is lying on, the scent of Hannibal's musk and precum a tantalizing tease on Will's salivating tongue.

Before Will can ask what Hannibal is doing, Hannibal's warm hand is reaching into Will's boxers and drawing out his cock, erection barely longer than the opening in the fabric. Without preamble, Hannibal leans down and sucks Will into his mouth, slurping the entirety of Will's shaft in a single, wet swallow.

"*Ugh*," Will grunts, unable to stop himself from thrusting against Hannibal's lips. The heat around his dick is *scorching*, and Will feels as though he could happily melt into Hannibal's mouth, disappear inside the older man until there was nothing of Will left that hasn't been consumed by Hannibal's insatiable appetite.

Hannibal lets go of his cock with an obscene slurp and says, "Fill yourself, Will. I know you want to be sated by my cock as much as my mouth."

Will nods, curls flopping messily onto his forehead, and reaches over to pull Hannibal's thick erection out of his burgundy boxers. Hannibal's cock is hot and throbbing in Will's hand, the tip already glistening with precum. Will's mouth becomes flooded with saliva at the sight, and he wastes no time leaning over and licking Hannibal's cock into his waiting mouth.

They both groan. Hannibal's hands come to rest on Will's waist, tight enough to bruise (perhaps the skin will bruise, and Will will be marked once more by Hannibal's addictive touch). Will shudders at the pleasure-pain, sucking Hannibal's cock further into his mouth. The bulging head hits the back of his throat, and Will forces himself to keep going, keep pushing until Hannibal's entire shaft is lodged inside of him.

Hannibal sucks Will's cock into his own mouth, and Will whines and trembles at the duel sensations. The immense heat and pleasure from his dick. The daunting weight of Hannibal on his tongue. The delicious musk of Hannibal's arousal curling into his nose with every greedy, desperate inhale.

Will keeps Hannibal inside his throat until he is dizzy-headed. He pushes back, Hannibal's wet cock sliding out of his mouth, and breathes in for a moment, luxuriating in the taste of Hannibal's precum that sits on his tongue like a delicate morsel of food. Will gulps in a few more times, drawing as much oxygen into his burning lungs as he can before he grabs the base of Hannibal's shaft and pushes it into his mouth again.

It only takes a few minutes until Will feels the telltale tightening in his balls. Will shifts his hips, drawing off of Hannibal's shaft with a gasp.

"Hannibal," he moans. "I'm close."

Hannibal responds by tightening his fingers and sucking Will harder. Will cries out, spilling into Hannibal's waiting mouth. He thrusts a few more times into that liquid heat, drawing out

his orgasm, until the pressure on his cock becomes too much, and he has to beg Hannibal to let go.

Once Hannibal has released him, Will quickly sucks Hannibal back into his mouth, swallowing until the head of Hannibal's long cock is once more lodged in the back of his throat. Will is barely able to run his tongue along the vein on the underside of Hannibal's erection, teasing the skin as it slides back and forth inside his mouth. Saliva drips from the corners of Will's stretched lips, staining the pillow beneath his head.

Hannibal comes with a low, deep groan, flooding Will's mouth and throat with his delicious seed. Will gulps it down eagerly, nearly choking once Hannibal withdraws and Will is left empty once more, breathing heavily and still swallowing what remains of Hannibal's spend.

Hannibal flips himself back around, laying his head only a few centimeters from Will's on the pillow. His eyes look almost feral in the low light, black and maroon and so beautiful that Will wants to fall into them and never come back up.

"You're so pretty," Will breathes, bending down to place a gentle kiss on Hannibal's nose.

Hannibal blinks, surprised, and then gives Will a tiny, shy smile. His eyes glimmer. Will has never seen Hannibal look so…timid before. It stirs something protective inside of Will (and how ridiculous is that, Will protecting the most capable person he's ever met) but it is the truth.

"Thank you, darling," Hannibal says. He nuzzles his nose against Will, breath smelling of Will's seed. "I…do not believe I have ever been called that before."

"I guess I'll just have to keep saying it to make up for lost time," Will responds.

Will's lashes begin to flutter, tired now that he is sated. He drags his hands across Hannibal's chest, fingers catching in the thick carpet of chest hair. He runs his hands up and down the hair, lost in the sensations, occasionally reaching a pinky out to rub against Hannibal's nipple.

It is like this—Hannibal's breath on his face, Hannibal's body beneath his fingertips, Hannibal's love in the marrow of his bones—that Will finally falls asleep.

Christmas

Chapter Summary

Hannibal and Will share their first Christmas together.

The scent of cheap tobacco and sour saliva blows over Hannibal's face, and Hannibal flares his nostrils, only just stymieing the urge to clench his hands into fists. This meeting will be over soon, and the look on Will's face when he realizes what Hannibal has done for him will make the assault on his olfactory nerve worth every second of pain.

"What do ya think?" the man asks, chewing loudly. His jaw pops and creaks with his mastication, no doubt a symptom of late-stage oral cancer.

Hannibal pauses, staring at teeth the color of soil, and then looks back at the home behind him. "It will do. I'll have my attorney finish drawing up the papers and fax them to you this evening."

"Sure, sure." The man shoves his dirty, stained hands into his pockets, spitting a wad of tobacco onto the ground near Hannibal's pristine leather oxfords.

Hannibal decides that this man's meat—if any is viable after years of knowingly ingesting toxins like what was just spit near Hannibal's foot—will be served for his and Will's New Year's dinner. It is tradition in Lithuania for pork to be consumed during the celebration as a symbol of wealth and prosperity for the coming year, and though Hannibal has no belief in such symbols or luck, the world will certainly be more pleasant for the coming year without this man staining it with his presence.

"Good day," Hannibal says, carefully stepping over the shiny lump of tobacco and walking to his Bentley. It is later than he had hoped—the man's tour was meandering and uninspired—but the deed is done. Literally. Hannibal has just signed the deed to the property, and unless something truly astounding were to occur, the house will be Hannibal's before Christmas next week.

This, at least, puts Hannibal in a good mood. His drive back to Baltimore passes quickly, each second consumed by the thought of Will waiting for him at home.

As Hannibal pulls into the garage, he can feel a smile peeling over his face, unbidden. These past few weeks have seen Will positively *bloom*, the surety of Hannibal's love providing a solid foundation for Will's self-confidence, a beautiful thing which has only increased each day. Will has become more bold in asking for his wants and needs, more frequent in initiating contact. Hannibal could not have asked for a better response.

“Darling,” Hannibal calls, opening the door and stepping into the house. “I’ve returned.”

Will bounces into the living room, curls flying over bright-blue eyes. “Hannibal!” The boy launches himself into Hannibal’s waiting arms, wrapping his lithe legs around Hannibal’s abdomen and peppering his face with feather-soft kisses.

“Oh Will, how I ache when we are apart,” Hannibal murmurs, supping on Will’s mouth as one might a decanter of cognac. Hannibal laps at Will’s bottom lip, running his tongue over the bite-marks etched into the delicate pink flesh.

“Well,” Will gasps, writhing in Hannibal’s grip. “You could just choose not to leave.”

Hannibal sighs, wishing such a thing were possible, and presses one last, chaste kiss against Will’s (utterly tempting) mouth before setting him back onto the ground. “Unfortunately, such dreams are not to be. Think, if I never left, I would never get to see the lovely look on your face when I finally return home.”

Will blushes and tugs on the bottom of one of his ears. His face takes on a mischievous look, reminding Hannibal of the paintings of fey from old; if this is what the fairies in tales and stories looked like, Hannibal is certain he would fall under their spell like any other mortal man.

“I could fake it,” Will says, biting once more on his plush lower lip. “It wouldn't be a hard thing to do. I’m always happy to see you, whether it’s been five minutes or five hours.”

Hannibal melts. Without conscious thought, he leans down and kisses the tip of Will’s nose, savoring the feel of silky-smooth skin beneath his lips. “Perhaps one day. I am always open to being persuaded.”

Will rolls his eyes, cheeks still flushed a fetching shade of red. “Course you are. Come on, I want to show you something.” Will walks out of the room, and Hannibal allows himself a single, gratuitous glance at the boy’s pert bottom before following behind.

“Did you finish your translations for the day?”

“Yes. I left them in the office.” Will walks into the kitchen, grabbing a book from off the stainless steel countertop and presenting it to Hannibal. “I really like the essay you chose for me this time. It makes the translations…okay, not painless, but easier to do.”

“No one enjoys writing lines, but I promise the reward is well worth the effort.” Hannibal glances down at the book Will is holding and tilts his head. “And what is this?”

“I found it on one of the bookshelves near the back of your office. I thought…” Will pauses, bites gently on his bottom lip. “I thought you might want to cook some recipes together. With me. You could show me how you celebrated Christmas growing up.”

Hannibal gently takes the book from Will’s trembling hands, thumbing open the worn front cover and running his eyes over a wall of familiar handwriting.

His mother’s handwriting.

“This…” Hannibal is surprised to find that his own hands are trembling. He turns another page of the book, eyes misting over as familiar words and recipes jump off of the thick, yellow pages. “I have not seen this book in many, many years.”

Will looks at Hannibal’s face—directly into Hannibal’s eyes, his brave, sweet boy—and gives him a watery smile. Hannibal *feels* Will’s empathy like a physical touch, a caress over his face that sends his blood pounding and his heart racing. “It seemed special. I hope it’s okay that I brought it out.”

“Of course, darling. Special as it may be, it is nowhere near as precious as you.”

Hannibal hands the book back to the boy. Will blushes and hangs his head, a litany of curls falling over his pale forehead. “Do you want to cook something together tonight?”

“I can think of no greater pleasure.” Hannibal leans down, pressing a final kiss against Will’s curls (inhaling the sweet, contented scent of Will’s happiness), and then goes to grab his apron from where it is hanging on the wall. “Do you have a recipe in mind?”

“The cranberry pudding looked good,” Will murmurs, hair still hanging in front of his face.

Hannibal ties the black apron around his waist and walks over to Will, tucking his errant curls behind his ear. “I see your sweet tooth is still guiding your time in the kitchen.” With a smirk, Hannibal gently plucks the book from Will’s hands.

His eyes glance over the page. There, next to the recipe for cranberry pudding, is a small, amateurish drawing. A crayon butterfly with orange wings and a crumbling wax body.

Hannibal sucks in a surprised breath, touching the tiny drawing—tiny like the pale hands that drew it, like the body that labored over the page with intense gray eyes (like the size of the plate handed to Hannibal all those years ago, his sister’s flesh prepared for him by the very captors who slaughtered his parents and then his sister in turn).

“Hannibal?” Will’s voice seems so very far away, distant as though Will were calling to him from across the shores of an immense, foggy lake. “Are you okay?”

Hannibal realizes, rather belatedly, that he is crying. Parallel streams of tears fall on either side of his face. A few slip into the seams of his mouth, coating his tongue in salty, warm moisture. Hannibal purses his lips, licks away the liquid, amazed at how quickly the licked tears are replaced by more.

“Hannibal,” Will says. He tugs on Hannibal’s hand, guiding him onto one of the bar stools. “Here, let me…” Will tries to take the book from Hannibal, and Hannibal cannot help the way he instantly cradles the book to his chest, tears soaking into the yellowed pages and smearing the handwritten text.

“I’m sorry,” Hannibal whispers, voice broken. “I don’t…I can’t…” He eventually gives Will the book, hating how small (how weak) he feels when it is no longer cradled in his arms.

“It’s okay,” Will whispers back. He reaches up, strokes Hannibal’s sweat-slick forehead. His hand is so soft now, no more calluses or roughness from living outside. Hannibal leans into the gentle touch, grounding himself in it even though his mind feels as though it is fracturing, slipping away, traveling down a deep, dark path that Hannibal has no wish to pursue.

Hannibal steels himself, taking a long, drawn-out breath. His pulse slows, steadies, though each caress of Will’s hand against his skin causes it to stutter once more. Hannibal wonders if there will ever come a day when Will’s touch does not affect him so viscerally; Hannibal sincerely hopes not.

“Do you want me to take it back?” Will asks, lowering his hand (and Hannibal immediately mourns the loss) to gesture toward the book that sits, so innocuously, on the kitchen counter.

“No, darling.” Hannibal touches the cover of the worn book, lightly dragging his fingertips over the faded brown leather, imagining another set of smaller, paler fingers next to his own. “I was simply…surprised and overcome. The drawing on the recipe page was done by my sister. Mischa.” And even this simple act—speaking Mischa’s name into the air—is enough to cause all of the air to leave Hannibal’s lungs. He shivers and drops open his mouth as if to recover the air that has suddenly been sucked from his body.

Will tilts his head, eyes widening in surprise. “Sister?”

Hannibal nods.

“You don’t…” Will pauses, bites on his bottom lip. “You don’t have to say anything. I know how hard it is, reliving painful memories.”

“They are not painful. Not all of them, at least. And perhaps that is what makes them so hard to relive. The sweetest, simplest moments have been cast into a bitter shadow because of what occurred after.”

“What happened later?” Will whispers. “What happened to Mischa?”

Hearing that name on Will’s lovely lips sends Hannibal spiraling towards another bout of tears. He stiffens his lips and rolls his shoulders, refusing to let them fall. “It happened the winter after our parents were killed. There was great political upheaval in the country; my family, being distantly descended from royal blood, were some of the first to fall. Mischa and I watched as our parents were slaughtered in front of us. Mischa was only four at the time.”

Will gives a low whine, the sound ripped out from the back of his throat. No doubt Hannibal’s loss (his utter despair) was crushing the boy. But Will, as always, manages to surprise Hannibal. The boy straightens in his seat and grabs Hannibal’s hand in his own, pressing their palms together.

Hannibal gives him a caliginous smile and continues. “I’ve never been able to parse why my sister and I were spared. Perhaps killing my parents was allowed under their misguided moral code, but the mercenaries drew the line at children. Perhaps they were holding us hostage for a ransom that would never come. Either way, Mischa and I lived with my parent’s murderers for several long months.” Hannibal sighs, purses his lips. “And then winter set in.”

“What are winters like in Lithuania?” Will asks.

“Not too much cooler than Baltimore. But our…hosts were not prepared. And there was a famine that winter unlike anything the country had experienced in hundreds of years. We ran out of food in the castle fairly quickly.” Hannibal stares at the kitchen counter, eyes unseeing as the horrors of the past flashed in front of his eyes like the shadows of a flickering flame. “The horses were the first to go. Our stable had plenty, and the meat was enough to feed our captors as well as Mischa and I.”

“And after the horses?” Will’s voice trembles. He must know, his brilliant boy, where this story is leading. What Hannibal is about to confess. But Will does not run. He does not scream. He does not flee.

Instead, he grips Hannibal’s hand tighter, shifting in his seat so that their knees are touching.

Hannibal wants to sob.

“After the horses were the dogs. The cats. Rodents. Eventually, though, there was nothing left. A terrific storm blew in and there was no leaving the castle, no driving to the village to beg for scraps.” Hannibal stares into Will’s eyes, soaking in the love (the strength) from the wonderfully perfect boy in front of him. “Mischa became ill. She was always a sickly child, though she was the strongest person I had ever met until I knew you. When the fever was too much…” Hannibal chokes, words stuck inside his throat, burning coals lodged inside his skin that melt away everything but the pain, the horror, the absolute atrocity Hannibal felt once he learned what he had eaten.

Will leans forward and envelops Hannibal into a hug. He wraps his arms tightly around Hannibal’s broad shoulders, pulling the man forward so that his head is resting on Will’s bony frame. Hannibal allows his tears to fall then, shedding them like a snake sheds its skin. These tears will be the last he sheds for Mischa. After this, the shadow will pass from her memory. Instead of horror, Hannibal will think of his sister and feel only the relief, the adoration Will is giving him with each press of his hands along Hannibal’s back, each murmured affirmation in Hannibal’s ear.

“I love you,” Hannibal whispers. “I love you so desperately, Mylimasis.”

“I love you too,” Will says.

And it is enough.

They sit like that for some time. Hannibal’s cheek grows warm from being pressed against Will’s shoulder. The tears on his face dry, leaving behind a tackiness that Hannibal is eager to wash away. But more than that, Hannibal’s heart feels lighter than it has his entire life. A weight has been lifted from him, borne away by the angel in his arms, and Hannibal wonders what he might have possibly done in a previous life to deserve the love of such a marvelous creature.

“Come, let us make that pudding,” Hannibal says, throat sore and hoarse. “Luckily for us, I bought up some cranberries at the farmer’s market last Saturday.”

Will smiles at him, a delicate thing, and wipes away his own tears. “That sounds great. Maybe after we could take a bath?”

“A wonderful idea, darling. You know I will never turn down an opportunity to see you undressed.”

Will rolls his eyes, cheeks flushing the color of ripe strawberries. His scent blooms with honey-sweet happiness, and Hannibal feels happiness warm his own soul.

The next day, Hannibal and Will finished decorating the house for Christmas.

In the past, Hannibal has not paid much attention to the holiday. As a child, his mother and father—both devout Christians—had religiously followed the traditions of their home country, including having a large, meatless meal on Christmas Eve and attending mass on Christmas day. There were no Christmas celebrations in the orphanage, and for three devastatingly long years, Hannibal never thought of the holiday except to weep for its loss. In his uncle’s house, Christmas was a decidedly secular affair, with plenty of presents and alcohol and no mention of Christ. Once in Baltimore, Hannibal would sometimes attend the occasional holiday party, but otherwise he ignored the holiday altogether.

With Will, that is an unacceptable arrangement.

Hannibal doubts the boy has ever received a gift or decorated a tree. He doubts Will has gone to bed on Christmas Eve with a sense of childlike anticipation, knowing there was something wonderful waiting for him when he woke.

Well, Hannibal was going to fix that immediately. Starting with the Christmas tree.

“Will, darling, would you grab the box of hooks?” Hannibal lowers his final bag of purchases to the ground, looking around the living room with satisfaction. In the corner of the room is a live fir tree, freshly cut and selected from a local nursery. It fills the room with the scent of balsam and snow. Surrounding the tree is every type of ornament and decoration conceivable; Hannibal—who had not owned a single Christmas ornament up until only a few hours ago—was not sure what Will would prefer, so he had decided to buy one of everything. Just in case.

Will, eyes wide and slightly overwhelmed, plucks one of the bags from off the floor and begins searching for the ornament hooks. He searches through three different bags before he finds them tucked next to one of the tree skirts Hannibal bought to match the ornaments. “Is this…all going on the tree?” Will asks.

“As much as you would like. This is your tree to decorate. I…might have purchased a few too many things.”

Will snorts, the sound lovely in its inelegance. “Yeah, I think so.” He sets the box of ornament hooks down and comes to stand by Hannibal, wrapping his arms around Hannibal’s waist. “Thank you. I’ve never really celebrated Christmas before. And to celebrate it with you, here, is more than I could have hoped for. Really.”

Hannibal smiles and envelopes Will in his arms (where the boy belongs). “Of course, darling. You deserve everything I can offer and more.”

Will stands on his toes and presses a kiss to Hannibal’s face, lips grazing along Hannibal’s sharp cheekbone. “I adore you,” he whispers.

Hannibal flushes, a new and surprising reaction, and watches with besotted eyes as Will begins dumping out each bag of decorations and sorting through which items he does and doesn’t like.

“Is this…” Will’s voice peters out as he lifts a blue silk flower into his hand.

“A wild sweet William,” Hannibal finishes. “I thought you might like them on the tree.”

Will’s face breaks into a huge grin. He quickly grabs the rest of the flowers and darts over to the tree, stuffing the flowers into random branches, clearly not caring about balance or spacing out the decorations in a pleasing manner. Hannibal allows the messy decorations, so happy that he has pleased Will that even if the tree were the most mismatched, lopsided tree in Baltimore, Hannibal would allow it just to see even a hint of Will’s brilliant smile.

They spend the rest of the day finishing decorating the tree and house, taking a break to drink hot cocoa and eat a light lunch of chilled plasma *consommé* and cornbread madeleines. Afterward, Hannibal takes Will to bed, watching with lust-filled eyes as Will rides him until they both tumble off of the cliff of pleasure together.

On December 23rd, Hannibal returns to Bedelia’s office for his last day of work until he returns in January. Bedelia greets him with her usual cool tone, expertly put-together as always.

“Are you looking forward to your time off?” she asks, voice polite but distant, nearly disinterested. If it were anyone else using that tone of voice with Hannibal, he would swiftly cease any and all relationship with them; he is a man sought-after and revered, and he has no use for people who merely tolerate his presence and conversation. As it were, Bedelia was still useful to Hannibal, the next stepping stone in the upward trajectory of his illustrious career, so Hannibal allowed the coolness, the disinterest.

For now.

“Will makes the commonplace seem extraordinary. I always look forward to spending more time with him.”

Bedelia tilts her head, a single curl of blonde hair falling from behind her ear and landing on her cheek. “It is always gratifying to find someone who complements us so well. It is gratifying when someone sees us. Or at least has the ability to see us, if we allow them to. But such sight requires trust. Tell me, then, is that what led you to your adoption of young Will?”

“There were a variety of circumstances that led to Will’s adoption.” Hannibal sits back on Bedelia’s couch, staring out the window. “I never believed in fate until I met him.”

“Fate is an interesting concept. It can be molded, shaped to one’s wills and whims.”

Hannibal hums, a noncommittal noise. There’s a knock on Bedelia’s office door, and her assistant pops inside, a light flush coloring her face at the sight of Hannibal. Hannibal ignores the silly, child-like crush, wondering how he ever managed to find such shallow affections pleasing now that he has experienced the depth of Will’s love.

“Margot Verger is here for her appointment, Dr. Lecter.”

“Thank you,” he says, grateful his mask is firmly in place, otherwise he might be tempted to roll his eyes at Lisa’s unprofessional giggle.

Once Lisa leaves, Bedelia turns to him and says, “I am eager to see how this week's session will unfold. Ms. Verger looked as though she would rather attend her own funeral than therapy during last week’s appointment.”

“Perhaps that is true,” Hannibal remarks, standing in a single, graceful movement. “Diving into one’s mind can be much harder than diving into one’s grave.”

Bedelia huffs out a quiet laugh and joins Hannibal, both of them walking out into the hallway and toward the room where Margot is waiting.

The therapy appointment goes no more smoothly this week than last. Margot is quiet, nearly sullen, dodging questions and casting a wary eye at Bedelia from where the woman sits, silently, in the corner of the room. Hannibal tries to guide Ms. Verger, presenting questions like shiny lures for her to bite, but she is a stubborn fish who refuses the bait, not answering the questions in any meaningful way. She does provide a few pieces of information that Hannibal turns over in his mind, but otherwise the session is rather dull. At the end of the hour, Margot thanks them both for their time before leaving with her head held high, her shoulders set back, and her spine ramrod straight as if walking into battle.

Hannibal ruminates on the way home, thinking of Margot and, more pressingly, Margot’s older brother. Mason has always been the most unpleasant socialite that Hannibal has had the misfortune of meeting, but if Margot is to be believed, Mason is also a serial rapist who enjoys feeding drugged chocolates to his victims before leading them into one of the many hidden nooks of Muskrat Farms for his crimes.

If this is true, it proves yet again that Mason must be kept as far from Will as possible. Hannibal prepares a list of excuses in his head if Mason tries to invite Hannibal and Will to his farm again; there is no possible way Hannibal will ever let his boy near such a vile, repulsive creature.

Hannibal and Will spend the remainder of the evening cooking dinner—kidney pie made from a bank teller who memorized Hannibal’s card number and tried to siphon money from one of his accounts.

On the morning of Christmas Eve, Hannibal is surprised to find himself alone when he wakes. This is a rare occurrence; Hannibal nearly always wakes before Will, and on the off chance that Will is the first to rise, he never leaves the bed, content to sit and wait for

Hannibal so that they can leave the bed together. It is a habit that Hannibal is keen to continue. He never wants there to come a day when Will's face is not the first thing he sees in the morning.

"Will?" he calls, slipping off the duvet and standing with a quiet groan. "Darling?" There is no noise coming from the bathroom, nor from the hallway outside. With a frown, Hannibal wraps himself in his silk burgundy robe and heads downstairs. While he's walking, he smells something sweet in the air, something that plucks and tugs at a memory deep in the recesses of his brain.

With a slight tremble in his step, Hannibal walks into the kitchen, eyes widening when he sees the veritable feast that Will has prepared. The boy must have been slaving away for hours to have all of this ready so early in the morning.

"Will…" Hannibal says.

Will stands behind the near-to-bursting kitchen counter, a dirty apron wrapped around his trim waist. His curls are in disarray, clinging to his sweaty forehead. His cheeks are flushed, no doubt from standing in front of the warm oven for so long. His nose is dusted with flour, and there's a smear of something dark (chocolate frosting, perhaps?) across his neck. His eyes are large, anxious, and Hannibal notes the apprehension curling in the air.

That simply won't do.

"Darling, did you make all of these dishes this morning?"

Will nods, biting down on his (already swollen) bottom lip. "It's all of the recipes in your mother's book. I wanted to make it for you as a gift. The book says that you eat this all on *Kūčios*. That's today, right?"

Hannibal feels himself falling in love again, so overcome with the feeling that he cannot help but reach out and tug the stunning boy in front of him closer so that they are standing chest to chest. Hannibal leans down and kisses Will, messy and hungry, licking into the boy's plush mouth with unbridled hunger.

"Perfect," he murmurs, drawing away to lick up the substance on Will's neck—a chocolate sauce with a hint of bitterness. It tastes like manna coming from Will's skin, the sweetness of the chocolate mixing with Will's tangy sweat to form a heady combination. "You are absolutely, utterly perfect."

Will whines, squirming in Hannibal's grip. "I…It's not done yet." He shudders when Hannibal sucks a deep bruise into the tempting pale flesh of his neck. Will arches his back, presenting himself for Hannibal's consumption, a supplicant willingly spread upon the altar.

Hannibal trails his mouth to the other side of Will's tempting neck and sucks an equally deep mark into Will's flesh, licking at the tender skin when he's done. "Would you like some help, sweet boy?"

“No,” Will breathes, eyes hazy with arousal. “This is your gift. If you want, though, you can start tasting what I’ve already made.”

“Not yet,” Hannibal answers. He leans back, tucking one of Will’s curls behind his ear. “I wish to savor each bite with you. We will both enjoy the meal once you are finished.”

Will beams, flushed lips spreading into a dazzling smile. Hannibal cannot help but smile back, heart leaping in his chest at the utter perfection in front of him. “There’s only one thing left in the oven,” Will says. “It should be done soon. Will you set the table for me?”

“Anything, darling.” Hannibal places one last kiss on Will’s succulent mouth before walking to the cabinet and retrieving two plates for them to eat on. He fetches two sets of silverware and two cups as well, taking all of the items into the dining room and placing them onto the table.

While the last mystery food is still cooking in the oven, Hannibal and Will bring the finished dishes into the dining room, each one set with care onto the wooden table. Hannibal sees sautéed herring with sweet carrots, fruit compote, and even *kūčiukai* served with poppy milk. Though a meal such as this would traditionally be eaten later in the day, Hannibal is so proud of Will for what he has done (for what he has given to Hannibal, and not just with the food he’s prepared) that Hannibal cannot complain about eating such dishes for breakfast. Far from it; Hannibal cannot think of a better present he has ever received in his life, and he is ecstatic to eat it now rather than waiting until dinnertime.

“This all looks wonderful,” Hannibal says, watching with curious eyes as Will pulls the last dish from the oven. It’s a pan of *sausainiai grybukai*, no doubt the source of the chocolate sauce on Will’s neck. Hannibal inhales the sweet scent of the cookies, amazed at how much planning must have gone into a meal such as this. Where did Will get all the ingredients? How did Will manage to accomplish such a thing without any help from Hannibal? Hannibal feels as though he might burst with pride for his boy.

“Okay, that’s everything,” Will says. He blushes and ducks his head when Hannibal walks over to untie his apron. Hannibal allows his hands to linger, caressing Will’s lower spine with gentle touches. Will is so responsive, still touch starved even after months of conditioning. Hannibal adores the boy’s reactions and continues running his hands along Will’s back until Will sighs and pulls away.

“The food,” he chokes out, cheeks tinged a delicious shade of pink. “It’s getting cold.”

“So it is,” Hannibal murmurs. “We will not let your glorious meal go to waste. I’ve never received such a wonderful gift before. Thank you, my love.”

“Don’t thank me until you’ve had your first bite.” Will grasps Hannibal’s hand and leads him into the dining room, eyeing each of the dishes as he walks past. He sits in his seat next to Hannibal, anxiety once again souring his scent.

Hannibal immediately wishes to soothe the boy’s discomfort; as delicious as the scent of his fear can be, Hannibal does not want it to mar their meal together. “There is nothing to be afraid of, Mylimasis. It smells wonderful, it looks delicious, and even if the taste is not what

you had hoped, and I am so incredibly proud of you for trying. I care not in the slightest if you prepared the food differently than how my mother made it."

"If you're sure," Will whispers.

"I'm sure." Hannibal dishes out the food for them both, gathering a small portion of each item until their plates are bursting with a veritable bouquet of colors and flavors. Hannibal inhales the mixture, closing his eyes for a brief moment and simply allowing himself to soak in the scent of the meal.

It smells like home.

Hannibal lifts his fork and spears some of the herring onto the metal tines. Will watches this with wary eyes, not moving to grab his own fork. With Will's eyes still on him, Hannibal lifts the bite to his mouth, delicately closing his lips over the cooked fish before sliding the fork from his mouth.

It's…delicious.

Hannibal moans around the food, chewing slowly to savor each flavor as it is revealed. The fish is tender, still warm from the stove. The skin flakes off underneath Hannibal's tongue, melting away to reveal the slightly salted fish below.

Once the bite has been properly chewed and swallowed, Hannibal leans back in his chair and looks Will straight in the eye, forcing Will to see the truth in his words. "Will, this is the best fish I have ever partaken of."

Will turns a stunning shade of crimson. "Oh," is all he manages to say.

"Won't you try some?" Hannibal coaxes, nudging Will's hand with his own. "See for yourself how wonderfully you've done."

Will nods, reaching out to grab his fork and spear a bite of fish onto the tip. He brings the food to his mouth and eats it in a single, large swallow. His eyes widen with surprise. "Oh, that *is* good."

"Sweet boy, of course it is. You hold more talent in the tip of your pinky than most people possess in their entire being. I am so infinitely pleased with you. Thank you."

Will squirms under the praise, scent flushing with pride and a tiny hint of arousal. He dips his head in thanks, then spears another bite of food.

"However did you procure all the ingredients?" Hannibal asks, spearing another bite of fish onto his fork. "I don't recall having herring stocked in my fridge."

Will smiles. His face bursts with pride. "You already had most of the ingredients. Last week, I slipped the herring and poppy milk onto the conveyor belt when I told you I wanted some more risotto."

Hannibal thinks back to last week, to the trip to the grocery store that Will must be referring to. While they were ringing up their items, Will had asked (with wide eyes and a plaintive voice) if Hannibal could go and fetch some risotto. They had both been standing at the check-out counter of the store, a young woman with a nose piercing ringing up each item in sullen silence. Hannibal had been so proud of Will for asking for something, for voicing his desires, that he hadn't thought twice about walking from the counter and heading back into the aisle to fetch the rice. Will must have slipped the fish and milk onto the counter for the woman to ring up while Hannibal was away, then hidden the ingredients in the fridge until today.

His clever, brilliant boy.

Hannibal stores the memory of Will at the counter (of Will outsmarting Hannibal in order to provide him with a priceless gift) into a frame that he hangs in his Mind Palace. He scents the frame with the smell of cooked fish and sweet carrots.

They finish their meal in relative silence. Each bite Hannibal takes is like a declaration of love whispered into his ear. His eyes fill with unshed tears, overwhelmed by what Will has done for him this morning. That someone like Will, who has struggled with hunger his entire life, would cook such a feast and then willingly share it with Hannibal. This, combined with the nostalgia from the dishes now gracing his table, is enough to have Hannibal's heart pounding beneath his ribs.

After they eat, Hannibal and Will wash their plates like usual, putting away the remainder of the meal for later. Hannibal lovingly sets each covered dish into the fridge, still somewhat in awe that it was all made for him.

Hannibal guides Will into the office and sits down in his armchair, pulling his boy into his lap. Will melts against him, tucking his face into Hannibal's throat, small nose nuzzling along Hannibal's carotid artery. Could Will feel it race from this simple, innocent touch? Could he smell Hannibal's blood pulsing so close beneath his skin, desperate to claw its way out of his body and be consumed by the lovely creature now sitting in his lap?

"What are you thinking about? Will murmurs, lightly tracing the artery with his tongue.

Hannibal shivers. "You, darling. Always you."

Will laughs—a light, quiet sound—and continues licking at Hannibal's throat, teeth gently grazing across the taut tendons.

"You can bite," Hannibal whispers, suddenly desperate for the feel of Will's teeth sinking into his flesh. "I won't return to work for weeks. No one will see."

"What if I want them to see?" Will responds, tongue still tracing a tantalizing trail along Hannibal's trachea. "Would you let me? People would wonder why. Why a man like you, a renowned surgeon with perfect hair and perfect clothes and a perfect smile, has such a messy bite mark on his neck."

Hannibal groans, rolls his hips up so that his swelling erection rubs against the cleft of Will's covered bottom. "Do it."

Will keens, lapping a final time beneath Hannibal's chin before removing his lips and tongue from Hannibal's body. Before Hannibal can beg for the boy to return, Will sets his teeth along the juncture of Hannibal's clavicle and bites.

Hard.

Will's small teeth sink deep into Hannibal's skin, parting flesh and muscle like a ship cuts through smooth waters. Blood pours from the wound, and Hannibal eye's roll back into his head at the delicious pain. Will whines, lapping at the bite mark and drinking up the blood as though it were ambrosia.

"Darling," Hannibal says, voice deep and breathless. "Such a good boy for me."

Will continues licking up the trickling blood, red smearing over his pale skin and plush lips. Hannibal grabs a handful of the boy's curls and yanks Will's head back. Will tilts in Hannibal's lap, his own neck open and exposed, droplets of blood spilling from the corners of his lips and slipping down his chin, his neck, into the collar of his shirt.

"Do it," Will whispers, and that's all the encouragement Hannibal needs before he is leaning down and biting the same juncture on Will's collarbone. He doesn't allow his teeth to sink too deep, no matter how tempted he is; Will is still far too small for his age, too thin. Hannibal's teeth could easily tear away the tender flesh and leave the boy with a (perfect, permanent) scar. He only barely grazes the muscle below, immediately licking up the blood that begins pouring from the wound.

Perhaps one day Hannibal will permanently mark Will. A bite mark on the pale column of his throat. A scalpel cut on the meat of his thighs. A brand on his back, marking him as Hannibal's.

One day.

Hannibal reaches down, one hand still gripping the hair at the base of Will's neck, and uses his other hand to slip into the waistband of Will's sweatpants and draw out the boy's tiny cock. It rises, hard and wet, barely peeking over the line of his waistband. Hannibal coos and begins to stroke it. He spreads the leaking precum over the entire shaft, enamored with the wet sounds his palm makes as he forms a fist around the adorable thing.

"Hannibal," Will gasps, head tilted back, blood dripping from his open wound. He thrusts his hips into Hannibal's fist, eyes rolling back at the pleasure. Hannibal leans down and licks up the side of Will's neck, cleaning the blood that wells up from his wound with each twitch of the boy's hips.

Will, never one to forget about Hannibal's pleasure (and Hannibal has never had a partner who cared so much about him, about his body, about his gratification), reaches his own hand down and releases Hannibal's erection from the confines of his slacks. Will's small hand cannot manage to wrap all the way around his substantial girth, but even this simple touch is manna for Hannibal's soul. He can't help the low groan that escapes his lips as Will's talented fingers pull back his foreskin and massage his sensitive glans, spreading his sticky precum so that it coats his entire length.

“So good,” Hannibal murmurs, quickening his hand. “Such a good boy for me. I’ve never had such a perfect partner before. Your food nourished more than just my body, and I wish I could show you even a small sliver of the pleasure I received from your gift.” Hannibal tightens his hand, gripping the tip of Will’s cock with a nearly punishing grip. “I love you.”

Will cries out, head still tightly held in Hannibal’s fist, and spurts cum all over Hannibal’s palm, drenching it in viscous, white liquid.

Hannibal follows soon after, moaning as Will continues stroking him after his orgasm has sent shockwaves through his body. Hannibal releases Will’s hair, and the boy immediately collapses, tucking his face once more into Hannibal’s neck.

Hannibal murmurs words of adoration (of exaltation) in Lithuanian, each reverent vow pressed into the sweaty curls above Will’s ear. Will sighs, melts, molding his body into Hannibal’s own.

Despite the blood, semen, and sweat now drying between them, Hannibal cannot force his body to move, too sated to care about the tackiness on his skin and the stinging of his neck. He will have to get up eventually, will have to clean the bite marks on their necks and guide them both into the shower, but for now he relishes the feel of Will in his arms.

The feeling of home.

Christmas morning dawns cool and crisp. The curtains are mostly drawn across the bedroom window, but small beams of pale light still manage to escape, threading the room with horizontal lines of white. Will lazily traces one of these lines with eyes half-lidded and tired.

As Will stirs, he notes that Hannibal is no longer pressed against his back. With a frown, Will turns to face the left side of the bed, disappointed to find it empty. His bleary eyes trace the rumpled sheets, and when he touches the indent on Hannibal’s pillow, he finds it cool, the ridiculously expensive sheets flowing like cold water beneath his fingertips.

This was not what Will had expected for Christmas. Though he and Hannibal had not discussed what the day would entail, Will had thought that at the very least they would wake up together, wrapped in one another’s arms. There was nothing else Will wanted for the day; only Hannibal, surrounding him, (inside of him), owning him completely.

With a sigh, Will rises from the bed and quickly changes out of his pajamas, finding his favorite maroon sweater of Hannibal’s and sliding it over a clean pair of boxers. Will forgoes any other clothing, excited to see the look on Hannibal’s face when Will walks downstairs wearing nothing but the man’s sweater. The way Hannibal looks at Will—like he is something to be treasured or worshiped—is so intoxicating that Will thinks he will never get enough. Hannibal could stare at him like that every day, hungry and wanting, and Will would bask in the attention and then beg for more.

Will wonders (for only the briefest moment) what his biological mother is doing this morning. Is she with her own family, cooking breakfast in a beautifully decorated kitchen and chatting with children that she has not abandoned? Is she alone, content in an apartment

somewhere with nary a decoration in sight? Is she thinking of Will? Does she care that this is Will's first Christmas where he is celebrating the holiday rather than sloughing through the day with no hopes for the future?

The thoughts are pointless, but Will thinks them anyway. Despite not wanting any contact with the woman, she has still managed to infiltrate Will's mind in the form of wishful thinking and creeping doubts.

Will frowns, scrunching up his toes and feeling the hard wood beneath his feet. With each curl of his toes, his thoughts mellow, lessen, until he feels ready to see Hannibal without worrying the thoughts of his absent mother will be written all over his face like guilt splashed in red ink across a blank page.

Downstairs, the smell of something absolutely incredible fills Will's nose. He supposes that if he cannot wake up to Hannibal next to him in bed that this (Hannibal cooking for him) is the next-best alternative. The only excuse Hannibal has for not being next to Will's side is if he is providing for Will in some other way (and dear god, Will really has become a spoiled brat hasn't he. He can't find it in himself to care. Hannibal created this beast. Now Hannibal must feed it).

Will quickly makes his way into the kitchen, coming to a halt when he sees the countertops. There are dozens of dishes spread out on the marble and chrome surfaces, each plate and bowl filled to the brim with the most delicious-looking fare that Will can imagine.

Behind it all, Hannibal stands with a perfectly clean apron wrapped around his waist, a soft smile gracing his beautiful face as he looks at Will. His starched collar barely hides the bite mark on his collarbone, but Will can trace the very edges of it with his eyes, and the sight fills his body with warmth.

"Merry Christmas, darling," Hannibal says. His eyes rove over Will, taking in what he is (or, more importantly, *isn't* wearing), and Will delights in the blatant desire he sees reflected back at him.

Will cannot help himself; he runs over to Hannibal and hugs him, wrapping his arms tightly over the apron. His voice is hoarse, nearly broken when he responds, "Merry Christmas. I love you."

Hannibal shudders beneath him, and Will preens at the response, that it is *his* touch and *his* words that cause the unflappable doctor to tremble. Hannibal presses a kiss into his hair, running a hand along Will's lower back.

"I love you too. Would you like to set the table?"

"Are we just repeating yesterday, then? Is this your way of saying thank you? You don't have to, you know." Will pulls back, looks Hannibal straight in the eye. The low lighting of the kitchen gleams in Hannibal's maroon eyes, light reflected off of intricately cut garnet. "The gift was free. I don't need anything in return."

“Perhaps this meal is for me?” Hannibal says. He brushes his thumb across Will’s cheek, sending a burning path across the skin. “Perhaps I enjoy watching you eat what I have caught and provided for you. It gives me…a great amount of satisfaction to nourish you with my own hands.”

Will blushes and dips his head. “Oh. Well. I guess that makes sense.” Will licks his lips, then says, “I like when you cook for me, too.” He tilts his head up, making sure he has Hannibal’s full attention when he says, “But I like it better when I wake up next to you in bed.”

Hannibal’s pupils immediately dilate, black swallowing up the brilliant maroon. “Oh, darling, I apologize for not being there this morning. I promise to remedy my mistake tomorrow, if you will give me the chance.”

Will hums as if giving it thought. As if he would ever deny Hannibal anything, especially something they both want to happen. “I suppose that’s okay.”

“You spoil me, Mylimasis.”

Will grins and stands on his toes, placing a gentle kiss on Hannibal’s full lips. He loves Hannibal’s lips; loves the shade of pink they are, loves how sharp the cupid’s bow is, loves the way they feel against Will’s own mouth. Will wishes he could spend all his time touching them. But his stomach grumbles, and Will sighs, pulling away to set the table.

As Hannibal brings the dishes to the table one at a time, Will feels something foreign grow in his stomach. Anxiety? No, he is not anxious about anything. Excitement? Yes, there is some of that, but it’s not the right word. No, Will is feeling…

Anticipation.

Will can’t remember the last time he felt such a thing. There was nothing to anticipate before Hannibal, his days filled with scavenging garbage cans and fishing so that his constantly empty stomach could be filled for even a moment. Even with Hannibal these past few months, the feeling has never come up. Will has enjoyed each moment with the man, but until now, there was nothing to anticipate as all his needs have been met. Now, though, there was something new and different, something special to look forward to. Hannibal is fulfilling his wants, not just his needs, and Will anticipates the change.

Hidden behind the anticipation is a small sliver of fear. Will hears the voice in the back of his head that still whispers his life is too good to be true, that everything will come crashing down around him with one wrong word or action. Will ignores the fear, taking in Hannibal’s own posture. The man is practically vibrating, his own anticipation bleeding out of his body and settling into Will’s.

No, that voice is wrong. Hannibal loves him. Hannibal takes care of him. No matter what happens today (or any other day) Will is not going to wake up, alone and afraid, in the swamps of Louisiana again.

“Do you like it?” Hannibal asks, gesturing to the (near fully devoured) pastry on Will’s plate.

Will licks his lips and rolls his eyes. “What do you think? I find it hard to believe you didn’t come out of your mom’s stomach with a whisk in hand. Seriously, each day I have to re-decide what my new favorite food is.”

Hannibal sits up straighter in his chair, pride bursting from every pore. “As it should be.”

Will can’t find it in himself to be annoyed at Hannibal’s posturing. He loves this side of Hannibal (his vain, narcissistic tendencies that cause him to strut like a peacock across the stage of his kitchen) as much as every other side. “I suppose.”

They eat slowly, a languid meal shared between lovers. When Will feels as though one more bite might send him rushing to the nearest sink to empty his bulging stomach, he lays his fork down on his plate and again feels a rush of anticipation shiver up his spine.

“Do you have anything planned for the day?” Will asks, trying—and failing—to keep the excitement from his voice.

“Many things. Tell me Will, have you celebrated Christmas before?”

“Uh, not really.” Will licks a stray crumb from his bottom lip, amused when Hannibal’s eyes trace the movement with barely disguised hunger. “One year I managed to be in class the day we had a Christmas party. There were cookies. They tasted like cement paste mixed with cinnamon”

Hannibal frowns, perfect lips tilted down at each corner. “That sounds positively atrocious.”

Will throws his head back and laughs. “At the time, I thought they were the most delicious things in the world. I don’t think I’d ever had cinnamon before.”

“Well, I am glad we have been able to remedy at least that. I hope your Christmas today is a much better experience.”

“What about you?” Will asks. He thinks back to when Hannibal bore his soul to Will, detailing the murder of his entire family as well as the horrific fate of his sister post-mortem. “What do you usually do for Christmas?”

“I have attended a few holiday gatherings. I never particularly derived any joy from cheap tinsel and handsy colleagues. My Christmases as a child were certainly far more pleasant.”

“I guess we both have pretty low expectations then,” Will says.

“I suppose so.” Hannibal stands from the table and extends his hand to Will, palm facing up.

Will takes the hand without question, allowing himself to be pulled from his chair and led into the living room. Hannibal’s broad frame blocks his sight when they enter the doorway, but when Hannibal moves to the side and sits on the couch, Will suddenly can see the Christmas tree they decorated a few weeks ago.

He can also see the dozens (hundreds?) of presents sitting underneath, each wrapped in pretty parchment and topped with ribbons or bows. Some of the wrapping paper has glitter, some is

the same silver chrome as the kitchen countertops. Some of the gifts are boxes while others are strange, unfamiliar shapes. The smallest is no larger than Will's finger. The largest present by far looms beside the tree like a sentinel, nearly as tall as the ceiling.

Will's knees go weak, and he is only saved from collapse by Hannibal's immaculate reflexes.

"Darling," Hannibal says, worried. "Are you alright?"

Will feels lightheaded. He leans his forehead against Hannibal's shoulder, allowing the feel of the silky texture of Hannibal's sweater (a familiar, comforting thing) to soothe him.

"It's too much," he mumbles, words spoken into Hannibal's shoulder rather than into the air. "I don't…I can't…"

"Shh…" Hannibal says, grasping Will gently around the waist and tugging him closer. "Take all the time you need. We are in no rush."

Will gasps, gulping in air and drinking it down like he's been given a glass of water after days without. Eventually, his heart rate lowers and his hands stop trembling. Will pulls away from Hannibal's shoulder and looks back to the tree, to the mountain of presents surrounding it.

"Are those all for me?" he whispers, unable to keep the awe from his voice.

"Every single one," Hannibal answers. His voice is solemn, a vow spoken between them.

Will shifts so that he is sitting next to Hannibal rather than on top of him. "I…don't know what to say."

"You do not have to say a thing, love. I know that you are not yet used to receiving material things as a show of affection. However, I…I take great joy in spoiling you. It would make me excessively happy if you were to open them. Any of them can be returned if they are not to your liking."

Will scoffs, runs a hand through his curls. "I seriously doubt I won't like any of them, Hannibal." With a softer voice, he says, "Thank you."

"You are very welcome. Would you like for me to pick one for you to open?"

Will nods his head, glad to have the decision taken from him in the face of so much choice. Hannibal smiles and gets up from the couch, eyes wandering before he selects a gift of medium size. The package is wrapped in brown parchment paper and tied with twine. Hannibal sets the gift on Will's lap, and Will's eyes widen at the weight.

"It's heavy," he says.

"It is," Hannibal responds, amused.

Will stares at the gift as if it might explode at any moment. With slow, careful movements, Will unties the twine and sets it on the couch, not sure whether Hannibal will want it back.

He peels away the parchment paper to reveal…a tackle box?

“Is this…” Will doesn’t finish his sentence, too busy inspecting the present. The box is made of thick, green plastic and has a clip so the lid will stay closed. Will unclips the top and looks inside, gasping at what he sees. Not only has Hannibal bought him a tackle box, he has filled the box to the brim with everything Will would ever need; hooks, line, lures, bobbers, a magnifying glass, and even some needle nose pliers.

Will stares down at the magnificent gift, once more overwhelmed. This entire tackle box and its contents mean so much to him—not only is the gift thoughtful, catering to Will’s interests, it is extremely practical. And this is just one gift of many.

“Hannibal…” Will breathes out, running a finger over the lid. “Thank you.” Tears flood Will’s eyes, blurring the room around him. “This is so nice. You are…I don’t have the words for how much I love you.”

Will leans into Hannibal’s side, soaking in the man’s warmth as Hannibal wraps an arm around Will’s shoulder and pulls him close.

“Your words echo my own thoughts. I love you so much, Mylimasis. These gifts are just one way I wish to show that affection.”

“I wish I could buy you nice things, too,” Will whispers. “I can’t give you what you’ve given me.”

“You have already given me a far greater gift than any material object. You’ve given me your heart, Will, and I treasure that above all else.”

Will sniffs, wipes a stray tear with the back of his hand. “Alright, enough of being sappy. Will you pick out another gift for me to open?”

Hannibal smirks, leaning down to kiss Will’s nose. “Of course, darling. Would you like me to take your tackle box?”

Will grasps the box tighter. “No. No, I think I’ll keep it here with me for now.”

Hannibal’s smile grows wider, nearly blinding in its intensity. He gets up from the couch and fetches another gift, this one dressed in golden wrapping paper and a cherry red bow.

“Here,” he says, and Will forces himself to set the tackle box next to him on the couch so that he can grab this new gift.

Will opens this one just as carefully as the last, again setting aside the red bow in case Hannibal wishes to use it again (is that a thing? Do people reuse the bows or simply throw them away? Will has no idea, he’s never opened a gift with a bow before). Inside is a package of ridiculously expensive looking drawing pencils. The brand is foreign, something Italian, and each of the pencils have a different type of lead.

“Will you teach me to draw with these?” Will asks, lifting the pencils out of the wrapped box and displaying them to Hannibal. “I’m guessing that’s why you got them, right?” Will flushes

with happiness; Hannibal got him a gift that would force them to spend more time together, as if living together and seeing one another every day was not enough. The thought causes a low thrum of arousal to flood Will's abdomen.

"I would be honored. Drawing is one skill that each person should learn. It sharpens the mind as well as the hand."

Will smiles, sets the pencils on top of the tackle box, and patiently waits for Hannibal to grab the next gift.

It goes on like this. The minutes stretch into hours as item after item is brought to Will's lap. Some are more practical, like the sweaters, shoes, and dictionaries. Others are catered to Will's taste, like the books on fly-fishing, the brand-new baking supplies, and the endless pages of piano music. Others, still, are clearly more for Hannibal than Will.

"What is it?" Will asks, puzzled. He lifts the lacy cloth out of its box and holds it in front of his face, trying to work out what, exactly, the tiny scrap of fabric was supposed to cover.

"Those are panties, darling."

Will immediately turns a deep shade of crimson, aroused and embarrassed in equal amounts. "P…panties? But I thought only girls wore those?"

Hannibal, looking far too calm considering what Will is holding in his hands, merely shakes his head. "Not at all. Those were specifically made for you." His voice curls over the words, accent thick with desire. When Will looks into Hannibal's eyes, he sees Hannibal's lust, sees *himself* as Hannibal sees him (as something precious, as something infinitely valuable and beautiful and perfect).

Will's heart steadies somewhat, and he looks back at the…panties. They are made of a cerulean blue lace, the same shade as his eyes. The front has more fabric than the back, no doubt to hold his cock in place. The back is little more than a single, skimpy strap, and Will burns at the thought of being so exposed; somehow, wearing these would leave him feeling more exposed than being completely naked in front of Hannibal.

Of course, the panties are only the beginning. Hannibal has spared no expense for this new section of Will's closet. Panties, bras, corsets, stockings, even a pair of black patent leather pumps. Will's eyes widen at the sheer volume of lingerie that Hannibal has purchased for him.

One of the last items Will opens is an object that initially confuses him. It's made of solid gold, rounded and thick on one end, slender in the middle, with a small ring at the base. Will is surprised by how heavy it is in his hands, far more weighty than its size would suggest.

"What is it?" Will asks, looking up at Hannibal.

The man's eyes have gone completely black, trained to where Will's small hands are gripping the golden object. Without blinking, Hannibal says, "It's an anal plug. You mentioned how empty you feel without me inside of you. Now, you never have to feel empty again."

Will squirms on the couch, arousal crashing through his body like a heavy wave. He grips the plug in his hands and suddenly wishes he were naked, that Hannibal's thick fingers were inside of him, opening him up to receive the golden plug.

"Oh," Will breathes, unable to say anything else.

Hannibal clears his throat and reaches for the last present. This final gift is the smallest one out of the bunch, a tiny box no larger than his pinky. "There is one more gift after this," Hannibal says while handing him the box.

Will's mind swims, wondering what more Hannibal could have possibly gotten for him. It seems there is one of every possible object in the room with them, so many gifts that both couches and the floor in-between them are stuffed with things and *still* there are more gifts spilling out from the living room and down the hall.

Will opens the box, surprised to find a small bronze key inside. "What does it go to?"

"A house."

Will tilts his head. "Your house?"

Hannibal shakes his head. Smiles. "No, darling. Yours."

Will's nose scrunches up, confused. "My house? What do you mean?"

"I mean, my sweet boy, that I bought you a house. It's about an hour's drive from here in Wolf Trap, Virginia. The house sits on ten acres of property, plenty of space to hike or run. There's a stream that cuts through the east side of the property. I've heard it's an excellent spot for fishing."

Will's face turns white, the key slipping from his grip and landing on the rug below. "You… bought me a house."

"Yes." Hannibal's voice is, once again, far too calm for the information he is conveying. He reaches down, picking up the key and setting it once more inside Will's sweat-slick palm. "It is yours to do with as you please. I hope to visit the house tomorrow, if the idea is amenable to you."

Will forces himself to keep breathing, to keep the tremors that want to wrack his body contained. It's only through sheer force alone that Will manages not to faint. "Hannibal, that's too much."

"I believe we have already had this discussion, Will. I have no shortage of funds, and I enjoy buying you things. This gift is no different from any of the others that I have bestowed."

"Of course it's different, Hannibal. Don't be coy now. It's a house!"

Hannibal sighs, adoration softening his gaze. It smooths the wrinkles from the corners of his eyes and causes his lips to tilt up at the edges. "I just want you to be happy."

What can Will possibly say to that? To refuse would be rude. Ungrateful. And Will refuses to be either of those things. Now that the shock is melting away, a deep-seated satisfaction is settling into his bones. Hannibal loves him so much that he bought Will a *house*. “I am happier now than I’ve ever been in my life.” Will pauses, swallows. “Thank you.”

Hannibal kisses Will, a swift peck on his lips, before standing and leaving to grab a few trash bags. Of course Hannibal wants to clean up now; Will doesn’t know why he expected an organized person such as Hannibal to do anything else. Will helps with the cleanup, scrunching up and throwing away all the wrapping paper, amazed at the sheer volume Hannibal used to wrap all of his gifts. By the time they are finished picking up the living room, they’ve filled over six garbage bags with wrapping paper alone.

“I have one more gift for you, darling,” Hannibal says. He reaches out his hand, and Will takes it without question, allowing himself to be led out of the living room and towards the staircase. When they reach the top, Will blushes, thinking they are heading toward the bedroom. But Hannibal surprises Will by continuing past the bedroom and heading toward a second set of stairs that Will has never used before.

“Where are we going?” Will asks. He eyes the second staircase with curiosity, mind racing with a thousand possibilities as to where they might lead.

“Patience. You will soon find out.” Hannibal begins walking up the stairs, hand still firmly holding Will’s own. At the top of the stairs is a door, the same material and size as all the rest in the house. Hannibal opens the door and then gestures for Will to step inside.

Will steps inside to find…a music room?

“What…” Will doesn’t finish his sentence, instead continuing to walk into the room, eyeing each item as he passes it in turn. They must be in Hannibal’s attic—or what was once his attic. Three large dormer windows allow ample light to flood the large open space, illuminating the dozen or so instruments strewn about the room. The first instrument Will passes is an elegant grand piano, made of the same wood as the one in Hannibal’s office downstairs. The next instrument is similar in shape to the piano but has two rows of keys rather than one. Will recognizes a harp and a violin, but besides that, he can’t name any of the other instruments he passes.

Will's mind suddenly recalls the smell of wood shavings and sweat. He thinks of the 'guests' that Hannibal had told him to ignore. Is this what he was referring to? Did Hannibal make this entire space just for him? The thought fills Will with endless pleasure.

When Will turns back to the door, he finds Hannibal leaning against the frame, a pleased expression on his face. “Do you like it?”

“It’s wonderful,” Will breathes. “Do you know how to play all of them?” Will asks, gesturing the instruments.

“I do,” Hannibal responds. Of course he does. “I could teach you, if you like.”

“Hannibal, I would love that.” Will can’t keep the happiness, the elation from his voice. This entire day has seemed a dream, this last present merely the bow on top of the gift of a day. “It’s actually a funny coincidence. My present to you is on the piano.”

Hannibal raises one of his eyebrows, intrigued. “Oh? I thought my gift was the lovely meal you made for me yesterday.”

Will blushes. “You got me hundreds of gifts. I only have two for you.” Before his nerves can get the best of him, Will slides onto the piano bench—his bare thighs prickling with the chill of the leather cushion beneath him—and poises his fingers over the keys. “I know you’ve been working on a song, but you haven’t figured out the ending yet.” Will brushes his pinky over one of the keys, calmed by the familiar, cool touch. “I think I found the ending for you.”

Will breathes in, out. He squares his shoulders and straightens his spine—just as Hannibal taught him. Without another word, he begins playing the familiar melody that has haunted his dreams these past three months. The beginning is Hannibal’s composition, each note lovingly played as Will moves with the music. At the end, though, instead of stopping where Hannibal has stopped, Will continues to play. His fingers fly over keys and chords, plucking out the remainder of Hannibal’s hauntingly beautiful melody. By the time the song is finished, Will is breathing heavy, heart thrumming to the beat of the music.

The room is quiet.

Will bites his lip, wondering if Hannibal hates it. Hates what Will did to his song. Maybe Will messed up too much, the sweat on his fingertips causing him to slip over several keys. Maybe—

Hannibal is suddenly at his side, his broad, powerful form blocking out the sunlight from the windows. Hannibal reaches down and places his hands on Will’s waist, turning Will so that he’s facing away from the piano and toward Hannibal.

“Darling…” Hannibal’s eyes are moist, glistening. A light flush highlights his carved cheekbones. He’s absolutely breathtaking, and Will refuses to blink lest he miss a single moment of the elegance before him.

“Did you like it?” Will asks meekly.

Hannibal lets out a small, quivering breath. “I *loved* it. It was perfect. You, my sweet boy, are perfect.” Hannibal leans down and places his lips over Will’s, licking into Will’s mouth like a man starved.

Will moans and wraps his arms around Hannibal’s neck, pulling the man closer. He shivers at the heat that surrounds him from Hannibal’s body. He soaks it in, wondering how he ever survived a day without Hannibal’s heat to warm him; it sinks into the very marrow of his bones, a heat that licks along his spine and floods his stomach until Will feels near to bursting with the flames.

“*Hannibal*,” Will whines, lapping at the corners of Hannibal’s mouth. “Take me to bed.”

Hannibal groans, his deep voice rumbling in Will's ears. He easily lifts Will from the bench, wrapping Will's legs around his waist as he walks from the attic and down the stairs. His warm hands grip Will's bare thighs, cupping the base of Will's ass. Will nibbles along Hannibal's neck, teeth grazing the bite mark from two days ago. Hannibal visibly trembles around him, and Will grins, biting down harder on the bruised flesh.

"Will, if you keep doing that then there is a very real possibility we will not make it to the bed."

"A shame," Will drawls, running his tongue over the sensitive skin. "I know you like seeing me spread out on your sheets."

With a growl, Hannibal rushes down the last few steps, practically sprinting to the bedroom door. He kicks the door open with his foot, dropping Will onto the bed without warning. Will bounces on the mattress, watching with hungry eyes as Hannibal quickly and efficiently strips out of his clothes.

Will slowly removes his (Hannibal's) sweater, throwing it to the ground before removing his boxers. Hannibal barely manages to fold his own clothing before pouncing on Will, pushing Will into the duvet as Hannibal mauls his exposed throat.

"Ugh," Will groans, tilting his head back to give Hannibal more room. Each nip of Hannibal's teeth against his skin sends sparks of pleasure coursing through his body. When Hannibal's bites become harder, deeper, Will can't help but thrust his hips into the air, wishing (like so many times before) that he wasn't so goddamn *empty*.

Hannibal continues biting Will's skin, moving from his neck down to his collarbone. He re-opens the bite mark he previously left on Will's skin, teeth sinking into the bruised flesh. It hurts, god it hurts, and Will feels as though he is being consumed by flames, the pleasure-pain so good it makes him want to cry. Hannibal laps at the blood now spilling from his clavicle, sucking on the wound to draw out more.

Will weakly threads his fingers into Hannibal's hair, pushing the man even further into his skin. He wants to be devoured, consumed, taken apart and remade by Hannibal's wickedly talented hands.

Hannibal bites once more on the opened wound and then continues downward, stopping to bite and lick at Will's nipples. They quickly become sensitive, each nub peaking under Hannibal's ministrations. Hannibal bites on the right one, drawing it into his mouth with teeth and pulling it so that it stretches away from Will's chest. Will whines, arching under the pain, nearly blinded by the sensation. When Hannibal finally has mercy on him and releases the tender nub, Will can only mewl and writhe, unsurprised to find that the blood from his shoulder has trickled down onto his chest. It smears over his nipples and covers Hannibal's luscious lips.

"Empty," Will slurs. "I'm so empty."

Hannibal pauses for a moment, a pained look crossing his face. "Wait here, darling. I'll be back in a moment."

“What…” Will watches, annoyed, as Hannibal gets up from the bed and practically runs out of the room, his large erection bobbing with each long stride. It would be a comical sight if Will weren’t so pent-up and aroused. He frowns at the empty doorway, chest heaving and heart pounding. What the hell is Hannibal doing?

It seems an eternity before Hannibal returns, and Will keeps his frown firmly in place, arms crossed over his sensitive, chafed nipples.

Hannibal’s face holds no shame as he carries Will’s brand-new butt plug past the bed and into the bathroom. Will hears the sink turn on, then the sound of frantic washing before the water is shut off and Hannibal returns to the bed.

“You left,” Will pouts, his erection still throbbing and aching. He feels so on edge that a mere brush of Hannibal’s fingertip against his skin could send him spiraling into orgasm.

“Trust me my love, it will be worth it,” Hannibal responds. He sets the plug on the nightstand and then reaches into the top drawer to draw out the glass bottle of lube. “It pains me to leave you empty. I am going to fill you up, then keep you plugged so that my seed cannot escape. You will be full of me at all times, never empty.”

Will’s eyes widen, imagining Hannibal’s cum inside of him for hours at a time, stuffed inside his hole and held there by the golden plug. The mental image is enough to have him squirming, and he grabs at Hannibal’s furry thighs, begging the man to hurry with his preparations.

Hannibal smiles at Will’s neediness, sharp teeth gleaming and white. “I know, darling. I know.” His fingers, now coated with a thick layer of lubricant, slide down Will’s crease, pausing when they reach his puckering hole. Will whines, arching his back in an effort to get the fingers inside of him faster. Where they belong.

With a snarl, Hannibal grips Will’s pale thigh with his free hand and shoves two fingers inside of Will without warning. Will moans, tossing his head back into the pillow. It feels so *right* to have Hannibal inside him. The burn, the stretch, the thick fullness of Hannibal’s fingers as they work him open, preparing him for Hannibal’s impressive girth. Everything is so exquisite that Will wants to cry from the sensations. He can only whine and beg, desperate for more.

“Look at how easily your hole opens for me,” Hannibal coos, thrusting his fingers in and out of Will with finesse. He purposely misses Will’s prostate, though the delicious stretch is more than enough to keep Will aroused. “Such a slutty hole. It used to be so small and innocent. I’ve stretched it out, haven’t I?”

Will’s cock spurts a weak dribble of precum at the words. Hannibal grins and leans down to lick it up, his eyes fluttering closed at the taste. “One day I will collect your seed and bake it into a delicacy for you. I’ll feed it to you by hand while you ride my cock. I’ll fill your stomach from both ends, stuff you full until there is no room for anything but me inside of you. Would you like that, Mylimasis?”

Will nods frantically, easily imagining Hannibal doing such a dirty, delicious thing. “Oh yes, *please*. Please stuff me full. I feel so *empty* when you’re not inside me.”

Hannibal shoves a third finger into Will, twisting his hand so that Will’s rim flutters over each digit, kissing them in thanks for finally filling him up.

A moment later, Hannibal removes his fingers and slicks up his thick cock, lathering it with lubricant until the pink flesh is glistening.

“I want to ride you,” Will gasps, getting up so that he’s kneeling in front of Hannibal.

Hannibal growls, turning so that he is sitting against the headboard and Will’s back is to his chest. “Like this,” Hannibal says. “I want you to see yourself. See how much pleasure I bring you.”

Will’s eyes widen as he stares at himself in the mirror across from Hannibal’s bed. He’s never faced it during sex before, always facing Hannibal (or, when Hannibal takes him from behind, facing the headboard). Now, though, unless Will closes his eyes, he will be watching each and every detail as Hannibal slides inside of him, claiming him in the most intimate way possible.

Will’s cheeks turn bright red, and he whines, a high, needy sound. Hannibal responds with a deep rumble, gripping Will’s thin hips and lifting Will into the air as though he weighs nothing. Without warning, Hannibal shoves Will onto his cock, keeping his grip firm as he pushes all the way until Will is sitting in Hannibal’s lap.

Will’s mouth opens wide, but no sound comes out, his very breath punched from his lungs by the sheer size of Hannibal inside of him. There is nothing but Hannibal, the scratch of his chest hair as it rubs against the sensitive skin of Will’s back, the aching stretch of his cock inside Will’s hole, the heat of him as he fills Will up completely.

Hannibal groans and lifts Will up again, forcing Will off his cock until the thick head catches against Will’s rim. And then he slams Will back down, forcing Will to accept his entire length in one achingly powerful thrust. Will watches in the mirror as his body is moved and used by Hannibal. As though Will were a toy, an object solely made for Hannibal’s pleasure.

The thought causes another spurt of precum to pulse from Will’s tiny cock. It dribbles from his throbbing head and leaks down his balls and into his crease, mixing with the lubricant and sweat that already slicks his entrance.

Will cannot tear his eyes away from the mirror, entranced with the differences between him and Hannibal. Will’s skin is pale and flushed, bruised from Hannibal’s tight grip and grazing teeth, while Hannibal’s skin is olive-toned and almost completely unmarred save for the bite on his collarbone. Will’s blue eyes are wide, while Hannibal’s maroon eyes are heavy-lidded, his chin tucked on Will’s shoulder so he can watch them in the mirror too. Will’s small mouth is parted and gasping while Hannibal’s perfect lips are pulled into a tight snarl. Will’s chest is bare save for the flushed heat of his skin, so unlike Hannibal’s hairy, muscular body. Even their hands are different; Will watches, entranced, as the veins on Hannibal’s hands bulge each time Hannibal grips his hips to lift him up and down on his cock.

Hannibal bites at Will's shoulder, teeth digging into the muscle, and Will tilts his head back and wails.

"Are you going to come for me, Mylimasis?" Hannibal asks, breathless from the strain of lifting Will up and down like a doll.

Will can only whine, so full of pleasure (of Hannibal) that he cannot utter a single word. Hannibal's cock is so large that each thrust, no matter the angle, grinds the fattened head of it against Will's prostate. Will rolls his hips in time with Hannibal's thrusts, eyes trained to the mirror as he watches his body writhe on Hannibal's cock.

"Hannibal, I'm close," Will says, voice airy and breathless.

"Come, darling," Hannibal chokes out, his hands still tight enough to bruise on Will's hip.

With a shout, Will tilts his head back and succumbs to the pleasure, fireworks exploding behind his eyelids as pulse after pulse of cum shoots from his body. Hannibal continues lifting Will up and down on his cock, uncaring of Will's oversensitive hole, entirely focused on his own pleasure. Will's arousal burns even hotter as he watches his body get used in such a fashion, and only a few moments later Hannibal comes as well, flooding Will's body with his seed.

This is Will's favorite part of sex with Hannibal; there is no other feeling in the world that comes close to the pleasure of being flooded with Hannibal's spend. It's so warm and wet, gushing against his inner walls and filling him up in the most sinful way possible. Will mewls at the sensation, rutting back down on Hannibal's slowly softening erection.

Hannibal coos into his ear, petting his sweaty sides as if to soothe him. Will watches in the mirror as Hannibal reaches over and grabs the golden plug from the nightstand, warming it in his hands before lifting Will off his cock and quickly sliding the plug inside to keep the come from trickling out. The sensation is unique, so different from Hannibal's cock or fingers, but not unpleasant. Will rolls his hips, testing it out, ecstatic to have a way to keep Hannibal's come inside of him.

"It's perfect," Will whispers, running a hand over the ring at the base of the plug. It fits so snug inside him, filling him up almost as well as Hannibal's cock.

"Yes," Hannibal agrees. His eyes are on Will's body in the mirror, tracing over every inch of exposed flesh. "Perfect."

The Art of Crafting Lures

Chapter Summary

> Hannibal continues his therapy with Margot Verger. Will comes to a conclusion about his and Hannibal's relationship.

"Wow," Will breathes, nose pressed against the window of the car door. "It's amazing! Hannibal, I can't believe you actually bought me a house."

Hannibal huffs, the air blowing quickly from his mouth and landing on the windshield. "Of course I actually bought you a house. Did you assume I was lying when I handed you the key yesterday?"

Will laughs, a light, carefree sound. Hannibal wants to bottle it up and keep it tucked into his chest, a precious treasure only he is allowed to hear. "I'm not sure what I thought yesterday. It was so much. But seeing the house in-person makes it more real."

Hannibal smiles and parks the Bentley in the driveway, inspecting the exterior of the house with critical eyes. The cleaning crew worked until Christmas Eve to have the house ready for Will. All traces of cigarette smoke and tobacco were removed from the interior, and a fresh coat of white paint was applied to the outside, causing the house to gleam in the morning sun. The yard has been trimmed, the porch swept, the windows washed. Everything is perfect for his boy, exactly as Hannibal had envisioned it.

"Can I go in?" Will asks, practically bouncing up and down in his seat.

"It is *your* house, darling. Peruse it, and the property, at your leisure."

Will grins and opens the car door, racing up the front steps and onto the porch. Hannibal follows behind at a more sedate pace, content to let Will have his moment. Will reaches into the pocket of his jeans and pulls out the bronze key gifted to him yesterday morning. With bated breath, Will slides the key into the lock and turns the knob.

Hannibal watches with amusement as Will stands on the entrance of the house, feet firmly planted on the welcome mat, not making the final step to go inside. Hannibal wonders if Will is worried that once he goes inside the dream will dissipate, and he will no longer be on the threshold of his own home but back in Louisiana, alone and hungry.

Hannibal cannot abide such doubts. He walks up the porch steps and stands behind Will, placing his broad palm at the base of Will's spine. Will immediately leans into the touch, and he looks up at Hannibal with gratitude and love written on each of his immaculate features.

"Thanks," Will whispers. "You always know what I need."

Hannibal leans down and kisses Will's soft, fluffy curls. "I certainly try. I am here for you, now and always."

After taking a deep, fortifying breath, Will steps into the house, the heavy rubber tread of his boots echoing loudly in the empty room. Hannibal walks in after him, noting with some disdain that there is still the tracest scent of tobacco in the air. He supposes it is nearly impossible to completely remove the smell of smoke after years of it being blown into the room (nearly impossible, but not completely; Hannibal will have to collect the business card of the owner of the cleaning service he hired).

"What do you think?" Hannibal asks. He stands in the empty room beside Will, imagining the place filled with fishing supplies, books, and all manner of things that Will enjoys. "It is yours to decorate and furnish. Anything you desire, just say the word and it will be done."

Will turns to look at him, a sheen of tears in his lovely sea-blue eyes. "Hannibal, I love it. Can we bring my new fishing poles here? And my tackle box, too."

"You and I are of a similar mind. Would you like to tour the rest of the house? The second story has a few bedrooms you can fill with your belongings as well."

Hannibal and Will survey the remainder of the house at a leisurely pace—Will is particularly fond of the bedroom that sits at the back of the house. The room's large window has a lovely view of the entire property, and Hannibal imagines the two of them sprawled on a bed together, basking in the afterglow of copulation, gazing out at the property that Hannibal gifted his boy.

After the tour of the house, they walk outside and begin hiking toward the stream, Will's short legs outpacing Hannibal for once in his haste to see the water.

The stream is wide and fast-moving. Small boulders crop up from the streambed, causing the water to break in its smooth flow. Around the water on both sides is a copse of trees, a mixture of pines and maples that fill the air with a clean, crisp smell.

"Will, darling, the water is far too cold to step into," Hannibal warns, watching as Will perches on the side of the bank. His face is in awe, curls falling into his eyes as he leans over the flowing water. His cheeks are flushed, though Hannibal cannot tell if it is from the cold or excitement. With the sounds of the stream and the scent of the pine and the morning light catching off the blonde strands of his silky hair, Will looks positively ethereal in his surroundings, a Botticelli angel brought to life. Hannibal itches to touch him, ruin him, smear him with blood and sin until the boy is just as dirty as Hannibal. But Hannibal simply looks. He notes with some interest that Will is also content to simply look, though the boy is staring at the water while Hannibal is staring at the boy.

Neither of them moves for a long while. A chill wind is what breaks their spell of silence, Will shivering in his coat as he finally gets up from the side of the stream.

"When can we come back?" he asks. His breath curls in the cool air, winding its way back toward the heavens from whence it (and its owner) came. "I want to try the new rods you bought me. And the waders, of course."

“I would be very sad if you were to lose your legs in the stream,” Hannibal remarks, voice dry.

“I know,” Will replies with a cheeky grin. “You love my legs.”

“Just so.” Hannibal sniffs, adjusts the cuffs of his pea coat. “We can return as soon as you wish, darling. Shall we head back to the house? I prepared a simple lunch for us. We can eat it in your kitchen.”

Will’s eyes widen at the words *your kitchen* as if he simply cannot grasp the concept. “Uh, sure. That sounds great.”

“Wonderful. I will heat up the oven. and you can unload your things from the car.”

With a heavy sigh, Will turns from the water and begins trudging back toward the house. Hannibal watches as Will glances back once, twice, three times during their trek north. Eventually the stream fades into the distance, and Will keeps his eyes forward.

When they return home that evening, Will is far more tired than usual, his pale, purple eyelids drooping with each step upstairs. By the time they reach their bedroom, Will all but collapses onto the bed, hugging the navy blue duvet with lean arms and tucking his nose into Hannibal’s pillow.

Hannibal looks, besotted, watching as Will instantly falls asleep to the scent of Hannibal filling his nose. Hannibal quietly covers the boy and then goes downstairs to cook dinner, placing Will’s portion of the meal into a container for when he wakes.

The next time they go to Wolf Trap, Will brings the rest of his fishing supplies with him along with a few changes of clothing to keep at the house in case of emergencies. Hannibal packs a sketchpad and pencils, content to sit along the side of the stream and sketch while Will fishes.

The house is as pretty as ever when they arrive, and Will hops out of the car without a word, gathering his new things with trembling arms and rushing inside to sort them and decide where they will be kept. Hannibal grabs his belongings as well, making sure to lock the Bentley behind him as he walks up the porch. Though the nearest neighbor is miles away, Hannibal knows from his own experience to always expect the unexpected. Should some poor swine be idiotic enough to try and steal his car, their end would be both swift and satisfying.

“I want to try fly fishing today,” Will tells Hannibal. The boy points to the fly-fishing pole Hannibal had bought for him after much research and more than one visit to a specialized store in downtown Baltimore. The manager had assured Hannibal that this model was the best for beginners, and Hannibal hopes (for the manager’s sake) that they were right.

“An excellent idea. Will you use one of the lures in your kit or try and make your own?”

Will scrunches his nose, eyes darting from his tackle box over to his brand-new fishing lure kit. “I want to try and make my own lure, I think.” Will bites his bottom lip, then says, “It

will make it different from the fishing I did in Louisiana. I don't…want to be reminded of those years."

Hannibal tilts his head. "You are brave to try and fish despite the painful reminder it might provide. It takes a strong person to be able to separate the pleasant from the unpleasant. You always amaze me, darling."

Will blushes and ducks his chin, running a finger along the hem of his coat. "Do you want to help me? We could learn together."

"I can think of nothing I would enjoy more." Hannibal unbuttons his own coat and hangs it on a hook near the front door. Will keeps his blue coat firmly zipped in place. Each time he dons the coat the fabric hugs his frame a little tighter, the fit slightly more snug as Will continues to gain weight.

Hannibal cannot say he minds the view.

"Why don't you bring the lure kit to the table, and we can work on it there?" Hannibal suggests, pulling out one of the chairs from the kitchen table and gracefully sitting down.

Will brings the kit over to the table, unwrapping the cellophane covering and carefully removing each item from inside. Hannibal appreciates Will's care, proud of the boy for not simply dumping out the contents like so many his age might do. Will's history (his lack of material belongings for years and years) have created a sense of caution, a feeling of responsibility that will remain with Will for the rest of his life.

They spend the next hour or so creating lures. Hannibal finds the work calming, each thread wrapped around a hook like a suture tied between flesh and bone. Hannibal wonders what it might be like to create lures from human hair and bone, if that might entice the fish more than the artificial feathers and plastic twine they are currently using. Hannibal decides his next victim will provide Will with the finest materials for his lures—a much better purpose than whatever his victim might currently be doing. Will deserves only the best, and Hannibal will provide.

"Yours look so neat," Will says, slumping back in his chair and wiping a tired hand over his brow. "How are you so good at everything?"

"Practice, darling," Hannibal responds, neatly tying the final string on his lure, tucking the knot into the feathers adorning its tip. "I imagine that one day you will become much more proficient in creating lures than me."

Will snorts (a sound that would be ugly and inelegant from any other creature. On Will, it merely sounds adorable). "Sure. You can tell me that to make me feel better. I appreciate it."

Hannibal smiles and shakes his head. "I am telling you that because it is the truth. You are so extremely capable, Will. Each day I look forward to seeing what you will accomplish."

Will smiles back, accepting the praise (and Will has come so far in accepting praise, his scent no longer souring with anxiety when Hannibal extols his virtues) and leaning to the side so he

can kiss Hannibal on the cheek. The skin burns beneath Will's lips, tingling even once he has gone. "I think I'm ready. Will you help me carry the supplies?"

"Of course."

Together, they manage to grab a fishing pole, their newly created lures, Hannibal's sketchpad, and two chairs for them to sit in (though Hannibal expects Will to remain standing inside the stream for the entirety of their excursion). Will dons his waders, the thick material awkward around his lean legs. Hannibal manages to keep a straight face as he watches Will struggle to walk in the heavy fabric, not wanting to embarrass Will and explain to him how utterly charming he looks despite (or perhaps because of) the clothing he is wearing.

They arrive at the stream in the early afternoon, the sun an orange glow glistening off the water. Hannibal sets up his chair and watches Will expertly string the line of his fishing pole, tying one of his lures to the tip in a few quick motions. When Will steps into the stream, he nearly falls over, no doubt unprepared for the sheer strength of the moving current. Still, Will is nothing if not tenacious, and he makes it to the center of the stream without any other mishaps.

Hannibal opens his sketchbook in his lap, taking in each detail of Will as he begins to draw the boy. He starts with Will's hands, thin fingers pale and clenched around the base of the fishing rod. Hannibal moves on to Will's torso, lean and covered in the hideous waders. Hannibal is slow as he traces Will's chest, wishing he could capture the active rise and fall of Will's lungs with his pencil. He continues upwards, marking the elegant slope of Will's neck, the strong cut of his jaw, the flush of his cheeks, the light glinting in his eyes. Hannibal sighs as he finishes with Will's infinitely beautiful curls, each strand of hair a caress of Hannibal's pencil against his paper.

When Hannibal is done with his sketch, he sets the small book aside and simply watches, absorbed in each movement of Will's perfect body. Instead of his pencil, Hannibal allows his eyes to trace the boy's features, never lingering for too long on any in particular, in love with each and every inch that he takes in.

Hannibal is sure that, were it up to Will, they would stay at the stream until the winter blossomed into spring, and the chilly air became warm and sweet with the fruits of new life. Alas, such a thing was not to be, and Hannibal finally convinces Will to wind up the line on his fishing rod and wade back to the stream's shore. Will's pout at being stopped is equal parts adorable and arousing, and Hannibal leans down to nip at the boy's full bottom lip before folding the chair he was sitting on and tucking his sketchbook beneath his arm.

They walk back to the house at a leisurely pace, the only sounds being the occasional chirping of a forlorn bird or the *swish swish swish* of Will's waders as the rough fabric rubs between his thighs. Once inside, Will sets his fishing pole and tackle box against the wall of the entryway, and Hannibal places the chairs back into one of the closets near the front door. As he turns back around, he notices Will is rather stuck, his waders pooled around his ankles while the zipper of his jacket remains caught on the material.

With an amused smile, Hannibal walks over to Will and gently untangles the boy, hands caressing his thin torso as Hannibal unlatches the zipper and removes the waders from Will's

legs. Hannibal sets them to the side to dry, shucking the jacket from Will's lovely arms and setting that to the side as well. Will remains quiet throughout, eyes wide and cheeks stained a lovely crimson. His heart pounds loud and clear in his chest, and even if Hannibal weren't blessed with near-inhuman hearing, he would still be able to make out the strong sound of it through Will's ribs.

As Hannibal removes the last of Will's outerwear, he sees a flash of blue beneath the boy's trousers, something cerulean (the same shade as Will's eyes). With a curious glance at Will's face—which has left the range of red and is now closer to purple—Hannibal lifts up Will's undershirt and feels his mouth go dry.

Will is wearing the matching bra and panties that Hannibal had gifted him. They sit, so innocuous, against the smooth, creamy flesh of Will's perfect body. The lace of the panties allows for some of Will's pubic hair to peek through, tiny dark curls that Hannibal wants to lick with his tongue until the hair is wet and sticking to the silk of the lingerie. The bra is also lace, the sheer fabric providing a tease of the pale pink nipples underneath.

Will whines when Hannibal says nothing, merely looks his fill, drinking in the sight below him. "Are you mad?" the boy asks, arousal and embarrassment clouding him like a thick smoke. Hannibal breathes in the heady combination, still staring at the way the bra and panties cling to Will's willowy form like a second skin.

"Mad? However could I be mad when presented with the most beautiful sight my eyes have ever beheld?"

Will squirms and subconsciously arches his back. The bra stretches across his chest, blue lace pulling taut to reveal more of Will's pert nipples. Without conscious thought, Hannibal leans down and bites on one of the pink nubs, gently grazing it with his teeth while simultaneously running his tongue across the soft lace. He continues to lick and bite until the fabric is drenched with his saliva, sticking, dark and wet, to the nipple underneath.

Hannibal pulls back, wiping his mouth with the back of his hand. Will's blue eyes are hazy, clouded with arousal. Will quickly discards his undershirt and trousers so that he is standing only in the bra and panties, a vision of flushed skin and cerulean lace.

"Please," Will whispers, reaching his lean arms up to wrap around Hannibal's neck. "Touch me." Will rubs his chest against Hannibal's shirt, the lace of his bra sticking to the fabric of Hannibal's button-up. Hannibal can feel the moisture soak through as his saliva transfers from Will's chest to his own. It causes a hot shiver to run up Hannibal's spine, and he grips the curls at the base of Will's neck, pulling the boy back until his throat is bared for Hannibal's use.

Hannibal leans down and licks across Will's throat, sucking a small mark at the base of his chin. Will shudders beneath him, hands clutching the fabric of Hannibal's shirt and drawing him closer. Hannibal smiles and continues to lick and suck his way across Will's neck, stopping at the juncture of Will's clavicle where the bite mark Hannibal gave the boy is still healing. Hannibal's groin throbs at the sight—bruised skin surrounding a definitive ring of teeth. He growls before biting down once more, teeth sinking into tender flesh and drawing blood.

Will writhes beneath him, crying out at the pain (the pleasure). Hannibal smiles, all teeth, and licks the blood now sluggishly dripping from the fresh wound. He continues licking the abused skin for a few more seconds, savoring each drop of coppery liquid that rolls across his tongue.

“Inside,” Will whimpers. “I want you inside of me.”

Hannibal leans back, licking the remaining blood from off of his mouth, and looks down at Will’s large, dark eyes. Will’s pupils are so dilated that only the thinnest ring of blue remains, the same stunning shade as the bra and panties he wears.

“Are you empty, darling?” Hannibal croons, running a finger down Will’s flushed cheek.

“No,” Will responds, and for a moment Hannibal is confused. He reaches around Will’s back and grabs one of Will’s cheeks, massaging the plump flesh before reaching his finger down to Will’s hole. He pauses when he feels a familiar metal ring sticking out. The metal is warm from being lodged inside of Will.

“Will,” Hannibal growls, “Have you been wearing your plug all day?”

Will moans and nods his head, biting down on his bottom lip hard enough to draw blood. Hannibal leans down and immediately licks it up, brain fogging with the taste. He could taste Will’s blood each and every day and still be parched for more. The flavor is so unique, so utterly Will that Hannibal fears he has become addicted, unable to go more than a day without tasting the salty-sweet liquid straight from the source.

Hannibal forces Will’s hands to unclasp from his neck, ignoring the cute pout that immediately forms on the boy’s mouth at their lack of physical contact. Hannibal steps back and begins to deftly remove his clothing, each item folded and placed on the kitchen counter until he is standing, naked, in front of Will.

Will’s eyes dart across Hannibal’s body, soaking in each inch of bared skin, and the fresh wave of arousal that spikes from Will is more flattering to Hannibal’s ego than any compliment or praise he’s ever received. He preens under Will’s perusal, puffing out his chest like some common animal but finding himself unable to stop.

Will lifts a trembling hand up to Hannibal’s pectorals and rakes his nails through Hannibal’s chest hair, fingers catching on some of the wiry curls. “God I love this,” the boy says, sounding half-drunk. “Why is it so hot? It shouldn’t be so hot. It is, though.” Will wraps one of the curls around his finger and tugs, hard, sending a sharp spike of pain shooting through Hannibal’s skin.

Hannibal snarls and leans forward, scooping Will into his arms before slamming the boy against the wall. He keeps one arm around Will’s thin waist, the other moving to tear at Will’s panties. He shreds them with a single, powerful pull, ripping the lace away from Will’s creamy skin so that the boy’s tiny erection is now exposed. It sits at the base of Will’s stomach, only a few inches of throbbing flesh, and Hannibal gives it a few firm tugs before leaning down to bite Will’s nipples through his bra.

Will groans, head falling back against the wall with a dull thud. He seems incapable of doing anything except writhing beneath Hannibal's mouth, small moans escaping his red, swollen lips with each firm nip of Hannibal's teeth against his pert nubs. Hannibal continues licking and biting, reaching one hand around to fondle the golden plug still sitting, firm and snug, inside of Will's hole.

Hannibal pushes against the base of it, shoving it further into Will's body. Will chokes, entire body curling in as if to protect itself from the onslaught of pleasure. Hannibal smiles, a dangerous, tooth-filled thing, and pushes further, forcing the ring of the plug to nearly disappear inside of Will's fluttering hole.

"Did you imagine this, darling?" Hannibal purrs, biting down once more on Will's nipple. "Did you imagine me playing with your hole until it opened up for me, ready to welcome me inside? Did the plug keep you from feeling so desperately empty? Or did you still miss me, still wish it were my cock inside of you instead of such a firm, unfeeling object?"

Will's eyelashes flutter, rapid movements like a butterfly beating its wings. "I wished it was you," he moans. "You feel so much better. So warm. So thick." Will rolls his hips, small erection rubbing against Hannibal's abdomen and smearing a trail of precum onto Hannibal's skin.

This small action tips Hannibal over the edge. Without pause, Hannibal rips the plug from Will's hole, lines up his own aching, leaking erection, and shoves himself into that perfect, tight heat.

Will keens, entire body jerking as Hannibal pushes his entire length inside. Though the plug has opened Will, it is nowhere near the size of Hannibal's thick shaft, and Will's ring is still painfully tight around Hannibal as he pulls back out—his swollen head catching on Will's rim—before slamming back in. Hannibal's precum smears around Will's ring, providing a hint of lubrication as Hannibal slides into the boy. There is still a burn from the lack of proper lubrication, and Hannibal's eyes roll back at the feel of skin dragging against skin.

Hannibal maintains a fast pace, barely sliding out of Will's gripping heat before pounding back into the boy's hole. Will's legs lift up from the ground and wrap around Hannibal's waist, pulling him closer. Hannibal begins to sweat, slick skin sliding against slick skin as his abdomen rubs against Will's sweaty chest. The lace of Will's bra sticks to Hannibal's damp chest hair, tugging on his wiry curls as he continues slamming into Will, cock throbbing against the silky-soft skin of Will's inner walls.

Hannibal shudders at the intense pleasure spreading through his body. He leans down and bites at Will's ear, teeth tugging on the cartilage and gently pulling it away from Will's curls.

"Hannibal," Will mewls. He tilts his head further back, eyes tightly shut as his body is rammed against the wall. Each slam of Hannibal's hips against Will's hole causes a punched-out groan to emerge from the boy's red, bitten lips. Hannibal soaks up the sounds of Will's pleasure the same way he soaks up the vise-like heat around his erection, both equally pleasurable as they are presented to Hannibal's senses like a feast.

“So beautiful,” Hannibal praises, not stopping his powerful thrusts. His voice is deep, gravely, drowning in pleasure and unwilling to come up for air. “You look like a vision. All for me. Always for me.”

“Yes,” Will says. His voice is near non-existent, the breath punched from his lungs with every snap of Hannibal’s hips. “Always yours.”

With a growl, Hannibal leans down and bites down on Will’s nipple, rubbing his tongue over the lace bra and soaking it with his saliva.

Will lets out a high, keening cry. He comes, tiny erection spurting a weak dribble of cum that is immediately smeared between their grinding bodies, the viscous liquid soaking into Hannibal’s burning skin as if his flesh itself is hungry to consume anything that Will gives it.

Hannibal thrusts inside Will’s contracting hole once, twice before coming. He floods Will’s body, pouring in his seed as if he could actually breed the boy. Hannibal fills him until his come is dripping out from his hole, spilling around Hannibal’s softening erection and trickling down his leg. Hannibal groans at the sight and reaches down to grab the golden plug, gently nestling it inside of Will so that the cum is trapped inside, filling up Will when Hannibal is forced to leave the ecstasy of his body.

Will is pliant in Hannibal’s arms as he redresses the boy, cooing words of love and adoration into Will’s ear as he pulls Will’s undershirt onto his lean torso. Hannibal cannot help himself from running his hands over the lace bra that peeks through the thin, white fabric, the sweat of Will’s skin causing the fabric to stick to his skin in the most obscene way. When they are both fully dressed, Hannibal leads Will out of the house and into the Bentley, watching with no small delight as Will winces when he sits down, the plug jostling his sore hole (a hole which Hannibal claimed and will claim again and again until one of them perishes). The thought fills Hannibal with an all-consuming satisfaction that does not leave his body for the rest of the evening.

Hannibal is loath to leave Will, but the next day finds him back inside of Bedelia’s office. He has only just stepped inside when Bedelia is pinning him with an inscrutable look and saying, “I will be unable to attend your therapy session with Ms. Verger today.”

Hannibal unbuttons his peacoat and neatly hangs it on the coat rack near the door. “Oh? Has something come up?”

“Unfortunately yes. I am sure you remember my patient Jason Larue.”

Hannibal nods. How could he forget such an interesting creature? If he did not have Will in his life, such a thing—a man so lost in his delusions he was willing to kill to see them through—would be the most interesting event that had occurred in some time. “I do.”

“It seems Mr. Larue has a brother who is…unhappy with the way events unfolded. He has not threatened me, but I noticed him standing outside my office building yesterday, and I am not allowing such a thing to go unreported. I am off to discuss the situation with the police. I should return by this afternoon, but as the appointment with Ms. Verger is in an hour, I am afraid you will have to guide her therapy yourself.” At this, Bedelia raises a single eyebrow

and wanders her gaze over Hannibal's towering form as if assessing his capability. "I am intrigued to see how your first one-on-one therapy session will go."

"You and I both, Bedelia," Hannibal murmurs. A drop of excitement lands in his stomach, spreading through his veins and ending up in the tips of his fingers. To have an entire hour alone with Ms. Verger without Bedelia there to watch…the possibilities seem endless. Hannibal, of course, keeps this excitement firmly contained behind a mask of passivity. "I wish you the best of luck then."

"I am sure I will need it," Bedelia says. She tips her head at him before walking outside, heels clicking as they echo down the hall.

When Bedelia is gone, Hannibal sits on one of her couches and ponders how he will spend his hour with Margot. Any and all information he can manipulate from the girl about her brother will be beneficial. But he could go further…perhaps, even, convince the abused girl to do something drastic. If Margot were to arrange for Mason to have some sort of accident, she would deal with Mason without Hannibal ever having to lift a finger.

Hannibal smiles to himself in the empty office, glad once more that he quit surgery to enter the field of psychiatry. There were just so many ways to manipulate a mind, to wind someone up to see how they go. He is very intrigued to see what will happen once he winds Margot up.

When Margot arrives for her appointment, Hannibal greets her with a polite smile and ushers her into the room.

"Where's Dr. Du Maurier?" Margot asks, taking off her coat and setting it on a chair. She doesn't sit, instead choosing to pace the room before standing in front of the window.

"Dr. Du Maurier had an unfortunate scheduling conflict. She should be back with us, as normal, next week."

Margot continues staring out the window. "I don't particularly care for Dr. Du Maurier."

Hannibal perks at this information. Margot is always such a closed book, even this small sliver of knowledge seems like a veritable feast when presented from her lips. "Oh? And why is that?"

Margot turns to face him, quirking her lipstick-stained lips. "Very obvious of you, Dr. Lecter. I thought therapists were supposed to be more subtle."

"I can be more subtle, if you like," Hannibal responds.

Margot smiles at that, and she is truly a lovely creature when not bogged down with dour thoughts and unpleasant reminders. "Don't bother. I get enough deception and subtly at home. I could do with something straightforward here."

"Just so," Hannibal says. "Why don't you tell me about home."

They talk for the remainder of the hour, Margot painting a most unflattering picture of her brother and father. Hannibal discovers Margot's preference for female company rather than

male, and he adds this to his growing list of information he can now hold over the girl if the time ever comes for her to be blackmailed. Though most of what they talk about is inconsequential, the seeds of trust have finally been planted, and Hannibal is confident that, with continued persuasion on his part, he can get Margot to do something volatile in regard to her brother.

Will is bored.

Hannibal is back with Bedelia, and Will is once more stuck at home. Will does not mind being alone, away from other people in the outside world; it is his preferred state of being. He does, however, mind being away from Hannibal. These past few weeks with only the two of them at home have proved to be a lethal dose of the drug that is Hannibal's attention. Now that Hannibal is not giving Will all of his attention anymore, Will feels himself withering away, crippled without the addicting feel of Hannibal's eyes on him, Hannibal's hands on him, Hannibal's love surrounding him with every move he makes.

Will frowns and throws down his pencil, pushing away the translations Hannibal had assigned him to work on for the day. What is the point in learning these goddamn languages if Hannibal isn't there to practice speaking them with? What is the point in listening to the recordings of bygone professors pronouncing impossible syllables if it isn't Hannibal's voice murmuring them into his ear? Without Hannibal, nothing gives Will any satisfaction, and with one last scowl, Will pulls away from the desk and trudges from the office into the kitchen.

At least Will can still find pleasure in cooking, though without Hannibal at his side (Hannibal's strong arms wrapped around his waist, Hannibal's low voice murmuring encouragement into his ear, Hannibal's fingers feeding him bits of food as the man fucks him over the kitchen counter) it still seems lackluster. Everything is a shade of gray without Hannibal, and Will sighs loudly into the empty kitchen, his eyes once more finding the clock to see how much longer it will be until Hannibal returns home.

Behind the clock, something glints, perhaps a piece of glass catching the light from the French double doors in Hannibal's kitchen. Will tilts his head, watching as the light continues to reflect even as he turns. Confused, Will walks over to the clock and peers behind it, to the corner of the ceiling.

It's a camera.

With a scoff, Will goes to the counter and grabs one of the stools from underneath, pulling it over to the clock so that he can be eye-level with the camera. And, yes, that's exactly what it is. Small, black, perfectly hidden behind the shadow of the clock. It has an excellent vantage point of the entirety of the kitchen save for the corner where it's perched.

How long has it been there? Did Hannibal install the camera when he brought Will home? Or has it been there for far longer? Considering Hannibal's nighttime activities, it makes sense he would want to keep his home safe from prying eyes.

Are there other cameras in the home that Will has missed?

Will feels infused with a sudden energy, running from room to room and see if he can spot another familiar glint of glass.

He is surprised by how many he finds.

There, in the entryway, facing the front door. One in the hallway leading to the office. Will can't find one in the office itself, but with its high ceilings and endless rows of bookshelves, he has no doubt there is a camera hidden there somewhere.

When Will goes into the guest bathroom, the one he used before moving into Hannibal's room, he can't contain his shocked cry when he finds a camera tucked behind the lights above the mirror. It has the perfect vantage point to see into the shower, even with the curtains pulled closed. Will flushes, imagining Hannibal watching him shower when he first arrived, dirty and scrawny and completely unaware.

Oh god, Will had touched himself in the shower, right after breaking Hannibal's rule of staying out of his bedroom. Hannibal had seemed so smug that night, as if he knew something that Will did not…and he had. He had watched Will orgasm to the thought of Hannibal's hand on his body and then punished Will by taking him to the opera.

Will…isn't sure how to feel. Is this intrusion really different than the countless others Hannibal has made on Will's privacy? Hannibal has drugged him, kidnapped him, fed him human flesh without his consent, and now Will knows Hannibal has watched him without his consent, too.

Will wants so bad to be angry. To be furious at this violation. But when he reaches for the anger that should be lodged in his throat, all he finds is a sort of bemused acceptance. It's Hannibal; of course the man was watching his every move without his knowledge.

With a sigh, Will rolls his shoulders—a trait he picked up from Hannibal (another way Hannibal has irrevocably changed him)—and goes downstairs to finish his godforsaken translations.

By the time Hannibal comes home, the cameras are far from the front of Will's mind, replaced instead with conjugations and grammar.

"Hello, darling."

Will looks up, confused for a moment by the slight tremor in Hannibal's voice. Is Hannibal… nervous? Will doesn't think he's ever heard the man's voice tremble in such a way, save for the time when Hannibal confessed his love to Will (Will's most treasured memory, the one he holds close to his chest when his empathy becomes too much, and he finds himself slipping into the minds of others without conscious thought).

"Hi," Will responds. "Are you feeling alright?" Will mentally slaps a hand over his forehead. Why oh why can he not be subtle for once in his life?

“I am,” Hannibal says. He sits on the piano bench, long fingers lightly trailing over the ivory keys. “Are you?”

Will huffs, pinches the bridge of his nose. As much as Will hates his own unsubtlety, he at least says what he means, unlike Hannibal who hides his meaning behind layers of skillfully concealed words and endless phrases with double meaning. Though his words are never very direct, there is, however, one part of Hannibal that cannot hide from Will no matter how it might try.

Will looks directly into Hannibal’s eyes, soaking in the brilliant maroon that gazes back. Carefully, gently, Will begins peeling back the layers of Hannibal’s person suit. On the top is Hannibal’s mask, a thin veil that Will easily removes. Behind the mask is the nervousness that Will heard in Hannibal’s greeting. Behind even that is…fear. Pride. All-consuming love.

Hannibal is afraid that Will is angry with him. That Will’s love is a conditional thing, and Hannibal keeping the cameras a secret has thrown it into jeopardy. That, even though Hannibal feels no shame for his actions, he realizes that what Will has found might cause Will stress and discomfort.

God, Will loves him.

“Hannibal,” Will begins, walking so that he is standing in front of where Hannibal is sitting. Like this, the two of them are at eye-level, for once the same height. He stares at Hannibal, glancing over each perfect feature in turn. Hannibal’s pointed chin. His plush, pale lips. The sharp edges of his cheekbones. The love seeping from his eyes like drops of blood. “I’m not mad at you. Yes, I found the cameras. Yes, I was a little…upset about them when I realized you never told me about them. Especially the one in the guest bathroom. But it doesn’t matter in the end. I love you. And I’m not going to stop loving you because you’ve hidden something from me. You are not very…open, at least not usually. It is not how you were made. I know that. And I still love you.”

Hannibal is openly weeping now, beautiful tears that stream down his face and drip from his chin onto the collar of his light-blue button-up. Will wants to lean over and lick them up, taste the salt on his tongue, but he holds himself back. This is an important conversation that needs to be had. Will has never been in a relationship before, but he knows communication is important (it was something that he lacked with his father, and look how that relationship turned out).

“Are you upset?” Hannibal asks. His voice is thick. Husky. It causes a shiver to run up Will’s spine.

“No.”

“I do not wish for you to be upset with me, especially over something like this.” Hannibal breathes in deeply. When he blows out the air, it flutters over Will’s face, tingling against his skin. “I cannot apologize for the cameras. They were installed before I found you, and it would be a lie to say I do not enjoy having sight of you always, especially when I am away.”

Will flushes. “I…like that you can always see me, too.”

Hannibal growls, low and deep in his throat, and Will cannot help it. He leans forward and laps up the tears still falling from Hannibal's glorious eyes, savoring the taste of salt and Hannibal on his tongue.

"I love you," Will says, breathless. "I love you so much."

"Darling, I would burn the *world* for you."

Will slips onto Hannibal's lap, straddling the man's powerful thighs. Will continues to lick up the tears from Hannibal's face, rolling his hips, not surprised to find his cock is hard and throbbing within the confines of his pants. Hannibal is also hard, his unnaturally large erection rubbing against Will's in a delicious friction.

Will wraps his arms around Hannibal's neck and continues to rock on Hannibal's lap until he spills in his pants, flooding them with sticky seed. Hannibal follows closely behind, coming with a grunt in Will's ear that causes Will's overspent cock to twitch inside of his boxers.

Hannibal carries Will into the bathroom to clean up, unable to keep his hands off of Will's body. Will doesn't mind, content to let the older man take care of him.

"Are there cameras in here?" he asks, gesturing to the en suite bathroom.

Hannibal shakes his head. "No, nor in our bedroom. I installed the cameras as a security measure when I first moved into the house. I came to the conclusion that if someone had made it to my bedroom or bathroom, it was too late for the cameras to be of any use for me."

"Did you watch me shower?" Will asks, toweling off his wet body. "Before, I mean. Before we started to sleep in the same bed."

Hannibal sighs and nods his head. "I did. I must admit, I took…great pleasure in the fact that I could watch you, see your form without your consent. You were glorious when I found you, and I could not help but admire you in each and every opportunity that presented itself."

Will burns, a fire that begins beneath his ribs and quickly spreads to each of his extremities. His spent cock twitches once more, rubbing against the soft cotton of the towel. "Why is that so hot," Will moans.

Hannibal's eyes darken, maroon swallowed up by black.

They end up needing another shower.

Later that week, Hannibal comes home with disappointing news.

"I invited Bedelia to dine with us Saturday evening," he says, hanging up his gray peacoat. "I hope this plan is amenable to you. If you are truly against her being here, I will cancel the dinner." When Hannibal looks down at Will, he doesn't hide the expectation in his eyes. "I do not wish to cancel."

Will frowns, staring down at his feet. He hates Bedelia, hates that she takes up so much of Hannibal's time. Hannibal inviting her to their home just means that even more of Hannibal's

time and attention will be occupied by the woman. Still frowning, Will says, “I can’t say I want her to be here. But I want you to be happy. So, fine. She can come.” Will sees the opportunity in the circumstances he has been dealt. “But if she comes, you have to teach me how to harvest a body.”

Hannibal pauses his movements, hands hovering over the groceries he has set on the kitchen countertop. “Pardon?”

“I want to learn how to prepare meat. I’m not asking you to take me hunting, I know how dangerous that would be. I’d only be in the way. But once the body is here, I don’t see how it could hurt. And I want to know how it’s done.”

Hannibal stares at Will as if trying to parse out the reasoning behind his sudden request. The reasoning is simple: Will loves Hannibal and wants to be a part of every aspect of his life, including (especially) this one. No one else knows Hannibal likes Will does. No one else ever will. And Will wants to keep it that way.

“Are you certain, darling?”

“I wouldn’t be asking if I wasn’t sure.”

Hannibal looks back down at the groceries, taking out the fresh spinach for tonight’s dinner. “Very well. Bedelia will dine with us on Saturday. And on Sunday, I shall teach you how to harvest meat.”

Will shivers, a thrill running up his spine at the thought of Hannibal, covered in blood, guiding Will’s hands as they cut through flesh and muscle together. “I’m looking forward to it.”

Hannibal seems wary of the idea still, but Will’s mind is already a million miles away, imagination taking flight with how their first time dissecting a body might go. And if this (Will so enamored with the idea of him and Hannibal killing someone together) is not enough to prove Will’s oddity, then surely nothing is.

Bedelia arrives at a quarter till seven on Saturday. Hannibal forces Will to stand by his side while they greet her at the front door. She’s dressed in a tight-fitting red gown, the same shade as the red lipstick on her mouth. Her blonde hair is twisted into a graceful bun, and her ears are adorned with shiny pearl earrings. Her blue eyes are cool, and Will forces himself to meet her gaze, to see what emotions are lingering behind her own mask.

Bedelia’s mask is nowhere near as complex or well-constructed as Hannibal’s. Will easily parses the emotions sitting beneath the surface: intrigue over Will and his relationship with Hannibal, wariness of Hannibal and what he may be hiding.

Lust.

Will bites the inside of his cheek, forcing himself to focus on the blood pouring into the mouth rather than the rage pouring into his veins.

God, he hates her. How dare she lust after what is his. Hannibal will never be hers, will never touch her the way he touches Will, will never love her the way he loves Will.

Right?

“Hannibal,” she says, voice quiet and collected. She shakes Hannibal’s hand, her palm lingering far too long on his skin. Hannibal allows the touch, doesn’t immediately shake off her caressing fingers or push her away. Rationally, Will understands why. Bedelia doesn’t know of his and Hannibal’s relationship. She can’t know. Hannibal has appearances to uphold.

Will doesn’t feel very rational at the moment.

Instead, Will is practically vibrating out of his skin, heart thrumming an uneven beat inside of his chest. He can’t help but glare as Bedelia looks down at him, reaching out to shake his hand next. Her hand does not linger on his skin. And her eyes do not linger on his face, immediately turning once more to face Hannibal.

The walk into the dining room is silent save for the classical music playing softly over the speakers. Bedelia sits across from Will at the table, directly to Hannibal’s left. Will pulls his chair back with more force than is necessary, slamming down into the seat and then immediately regretting it when his plug shoves up against his prostate and sends a wave of arousal through his entire body.

“Are you alright, Will?” Bedelia asks.

Will wants to snarl, to bare his teeth at the woman and then dive across the table and rip out her throat. “Fine,” he says, voice like gravel. “I pulled a muscle while fishing.”

“Fishing?” she asks. She tilts her head, looking almost like a bird of paradise with her flashing feathers and shiny jewelry. “I did not know you enjoyed fishing. It is a skill that takes a great deal of patience.”

The words and you are just an impatient child sit unspoken between them.

Will grins, all teeth, and watches Hannibal bring out their appetizer. “I can be very patient, Dr. Du Maurier.”

The table falls silent as Hannibal places three steaming bowls of soup onto the table. Each dish has been plated to perfection, a small sprig of fresh parsley gently resting atop the white liquid.

“French chestnut soup,” Hannibal says. He sits down at his seat, eyes lingering on Will for a moment longer than is perhaps necessary, before saying, “Bon appetit.”

Will digs into his soup with fervor, starving after a day of cleaning and cooking. He doesn’t look at Bedelia the entire time he is eating, content to stare at the soup or the table. Bedelia and Hannibal strike up a steady conversation, voices pitched low in an imitation of intimacy.

It makes Will grab his spoon harder, knuckles turning white as he attempts to drown out the rise and fall of their voices.

The next course is brought out, and Bedelia begins discussing a patient of hers, the brother of the man who stalked and attempted to kill her months ago. This gets Will's attention, and though his gaze remains firmly on his plate, his ears perk up and hang on to every word.

"I am glad the police were able to file the restraining order," Hannibal says, fork gently scraping against his plate as he scoops up a bite of quinoa. "So often these types of threats go unreported due to negligence on the part of our courts. I am happy that is not the case today."

"As am I," Bedelia responds. She eats like she speaks: slowly, methodically, each bite savored and chewed like she savors and chews her words.

Will frowns, shoving another pile of quinoa into his mouth. He has never felt so…inadequate before. Though Hannibal tells him daily how much he adores him and loves him, Will can't help but think how much better suited Bedelia is to Hannibal's lifestyle. She doesn't wake up gasping and crying from nightmares. She knows how to eat properly, not just shovel food into her mouth (worried it will be taken away if she doesn't). She doesn't curse or stutter or mumble. Everything about her is refined. Polished.

Will wants to take his polished fork and stab it into her pretty, pale neck.

Hannibal and Bedelia continue talking of psychiatric patients, and Will's mind wanders, only coming into focus when he realizes Bedelia is asking him a question.

"Yes?" he mumbles, cheeks flushing pink.

"I asked if you would be attending the fundraising gala in a few weeks. I understand it is on Hannibal's birthday, and I know how much he loves a good party."

Will squints down at his plate, imagining Bedelia is one of the grains of quinoa he is currently mangling with his fork. "I didn't know there was a gala on Hannibal's birthday." Will didn't know there was a gala. He didn't know Hannibal's birthday was coming up. Hannibal had mentioned, months ago, that his birthday was in January, but the thought had slipped from Will's mind like a ribbon untied and cast into a stream of rushing water.

"I did not want you to stress over attending," Hannibal says. His voice is calm, but there's an undertone to it, as if he is pleading with Will, asking him to not be upset. Will would be flattered if he weren't already so goddamn angry.

"Okay," Will says. "Well, I guess I'll be going wherever Hannibal tells me to go."

"It is a shame that not all teenagers are as obedient as you," Bedelia remarks.

There's a strained silence, and Hannibal clears his throat before going into the kitchen to fetch their dessert. Will can't even muster up any enthusiasm for the dish he spent so many hours laboring over this afternoon. The profiterole sits on his tongue, chocolate and vanilla

ice cream melting into his mouth like concrete mix. Will has to swallow three times before the pastry finally slides down his throat, agonizingly slow and incredibly uncomfortable.

Bedelia and Hannibal each take a glass of wine into the living room, and Will trails behind, a glass of water sitting in his clenched fist. He stands near the fireplace, back turned to both of the adults as they continue their conversation.

It seems an eternity before Bedelia finally leaves, a quiet farewell spoken to Will before Hannibal leads her to the foyer. Will stays behind, not wishing to see them say their own goodbyes. Would Hannibal draw her hand up for a kiss? Would he lean in and press his perfect lips to her cheek? Would he look at her with those hooded maroon eyes and tell her how happy he was that she came, how excited he is to see her again on Monday?

Will cannot help it; with a quiet cry, he throws his glass of water into the fireplace, watching with satisfaction as the glass shatters into a hundred tiny slivers. Steam rises as the water evaporates into the flames, and Will closes his eyes, savoring the feel of it on his too-hot skin.

“Will, is everything alright?” Hannibal asks.

Sighing, Will turns from the fireplace to face Hannibal. The man is standing at the edge of the room, unmoving, hip cocked and pressed against the wall. Will wants to punch the concerned look off his stupidly perfect face, to bite at his lips until they are bruised and bleeding, to grip that stunningly shiny hair and yank until Hannibal can only beg for Will to stop.

“I’m fine,” Will says. His voice is completely calm, smooth as a shard of glass. “Is Bedelia gone?”

“Yes, I saw her to the door.” Hannibal takes a step inside the room. Hesitant. Unsure. Almost exactly how he approached Will when Will had found Hannibal's secret basement (and the man dying inside). “Are you well, darling? You seem…upset.”

Will wants to laugh. Cry. Scream. Instead, he settles on a low huff of breath, one that leaves his mouth like a stream of fire. “I’m fine,” Will repeats.

Hannibal takes another step into the room. Another. When he’s only a few inches from Will, Will’s nostrils flare, picking up on a scent that was not there before.

Bedelia’s perfume.

Will snaps.

With a snarl, he grabs the lapels of Hannibal’s jacket and pushes the man onto the nearest couch, forcing Hannibal to sit down. Hannibal bounces on the plush leather, eyes wide with surprise. Will grins (a nasty, vindictive thing) and sits on Hannibal’s lap, pressing Hannibal further down into the cushions.

“What—”

Will doesn't let Hannibal finish his sentence. Without warning, he leans down and kisses Hannibal, biting down on those infuriatingly plush pale lips, drawing blood with the force of his teeth. Will laps at the spilled blood and continues kissing Hannibal, forcing his tongue inside the man's mouth and licking away the sour remains of wine and conversation.

While Will's mouth is consuming Hannibal, Will's hands are undressing him. It only takes a moment for Will to yank Hannibal's suit coat off, tossing it to the floor behind him. He rips open Hannibal's dress shirt, uncaring as buttons and thread fly to the floor. Hannibal's white undershirt shirt is next, this too being tossed to the floor in an unceremonious fashion. Will bites down on Hannibal's tongue, hips grinding against the older man as Will finally unzips Hannibal's slacks.

"Darling," Hannibal moans, voice wrecked. His eyes are hooded, nearly black, and they trace over Will's face as Will sticks his hand into Hannibal's boxers and takes out the man's cock. It is already fully hard, aching and hot in Will's firm grip. An obscene amount of precum has formed along the head, and it slides down the entire length, coating Hannibal's taut skin until it is slick and tacky.

Will reaches down and rips off his own trousers, quickly removing his boxers as well. He doesn't bother with his shirt or ridiculous-looking bow tie, too focused on getting Hannibal inside of him as quickly as possible.

Will slides the plug from out of him, setting it (more gently than the clothing) onto the floor. Finally, finally he is free, ready to consume Hannibal as Hannibal has consumed him (and will continue to consume him, if Will has anything to say about it).

Before Hannibal can speak, Will slams himself down on Hannibal's cock, his fluttering hole swallowing the entirety of Hannibal's erection in one smooth, firm motion. Hannibal groans and throws his head back, exposing his throat to Will.

A fatal mistake.

With a growl, Will leans forward and bites, teeth easily sinking into the tender flesh of Hannibal's neck. He licks at the wound, hips moving up and down in jerky motions as he begins riding Hannibal. Will pours his frustration (his love) into each roll of his hips, slamming back down on Hannibal's cock with a ferocity he didn't know he possessed.

Will could cry at how good it feels. Hannibal's cock is so large, so unbelievably long and thick, that each time it sinks inside of Will it feels as though he is being split in two. The throbbing head hits Will's prostate without fail, sending sparks of pleasure racing up Will's trembling spine. It only spurs him on to go faster, rock harder. Will grips Hannibal's shoulders with white-knuckled hands and leans down to bite over the open wound on Hannibal's neck.

"Mine," Will growls. His lips are smeared with Hannibal's blood, and he laps it up like a kitten licking up milk. Each drop of copper-tinged liquid is quickly devoured, and Will's eyes roll back at the familiar taste. "You're mine."

“Yes,” Hannibal responds. His voice is breathless, airy. His hands grip Will’s hips with brutal force, and Will looks forward to the bruises that Hannibal is no doubt leaving on his pale skin, a slew of marks that only he will see and feel. “I’m all yours, Mylimasis.”

Will continues to bounce up and down in Hannibal’s lap. Each time he sits back down, there’s a loud slap of skin meeting skin. Hannibal’s balls are tight, and Will can feel them hit his ass each time he is fully seated on Hannibal’s cock.

“Are you going to come for me?” he asks Hannibal, biting down on the man’s earlobe. “Are you going to fill me with your seed? Mark me so that everyone knows I am yours, and you are mine?”

Hannibal’s eyelids flutter shut, and a long groan escapes his lips. “Yes,” he says. “Yes, yes, yes.”

Will smiles, ecstatic to have reduced Hannibal into nothing but a shivering mess, the man unable to do anything but repeat the same word over and over again.

Could Bedelia do the same? Could she own Hannibal in such a way, tame him merely by the writhing of her hips and the sharpness of her teeth? Will knows Hannibal inside and out, and he adores each and every inch of the man. Bedelia is nothing compared to him. She is nothing to Hannibal. And Will makes sure Hannibal knows exactly who owns him.

With a few more snaps of his hips, Will lets out a loud moan as he feels Hannibal flood him with cum. It fills Will with a searing heat, the weight of it sitting perfect inside his aching body. Will’s own erection throbs in response, so close to orgasm but not quite there.

Uncaring of Hannibal’s comfort or pleasure, Will continues to ride the man, lips leaving a trail of bloody saliva across Hannibal’s neck as Will chases his own high. Hannibal lets out low grunts beneath him, sounds of pleasure-pain that melt against Will’s ear.

“Mine,” Will repeats, biting down hard on Hannibal’s neck a final time as he reaches his peak. His small cock spurts semen all over Hannibal’s exposed stomach, some of it reaching the man’s chest hair. Will growls at the sight, leaning down to smear the sticky seed into Hannibal’s thick, curly hair. “Only mine.”

Hannibal seems at a complete loss for words. His eyes are wide and unfocused, hazy with lust. Will feels like purring, content at the absolute mess he’s made of the man.

Will doesn’t move from his position, gently rocking his hips back and forth as Hannibal’s erection subsides, leaving his dick soft and limp. It remains inside of Will’s body, still large enough to leave Will gasping for breath with each and every inhale. Will wishes he could always have Hannibal inside of him, always have his cock instead of the cold, unforgiving plug. He wishes Hannibal never had to leave, never had to speak to anyone but Will. Will has never owned anything before meeting Hannibal, and now that he owns this man, he intends to show him (remind him) each and every day.

Will admires the ring of bruises and bite marks on Hannibal’s neck, each a perfect imprint of his teeth. Blood and spit cover the tender skin, and Will leans down to lick it away, cleaning

Hannibal's neck until all that remains are Will's marks.

Hannibal scoops Will into his arms and rearranges them so that they are both lying on the sofa, Will's back to Hannibal's chest. Their legs tangle together, and Will hums in contentment, happy to rest against the man he loves so utterly and completely.

"I am assuming that this is in response to Bedelia?" Hannibal asks.

Will bares his teeth at the mention of her name. It sours his afterglow, a drop of black ink in the white bliss of his mind. "She touched you. She flirted with you and batted her lashes like a *whore*," Will bites out. He doesn't think he's ever used that word before, only heard it thrown at the TV or a passing stranger when his father was too deep in the bottle (which was always). But the word feels righteous, somehow, being spit from Will's tongue.

Hannibal's hands tighten on Will's hip in warning. Will doesn't care. He won't take back what he said, not now. "Careful, darling. Put your fangs away. Bedelia is no threat to you. She is my colleague, nothing more."

Will frowns, unmoved. Hannibal may not see Bedelia as a threat, but Will certainly does. And Will is tired of hiding from threats, of letting them grow into looming shadows that threaten to block the sunlight from his life.

Will decides, then and there, lying in Hannibal's arms as they both come down from the pleasure of their coupling, that he is going to kill Bedelia. He will destroy her body, break each bone and slice open each vein so that there is no room for doubt in Hannibal's mind about who owns him. He'll feed her heart to Hannibal as they fuck over her dead, broken body, the taste of her blood in their mouths like the finest ambrosia.

All Will has to do now is make sure Hannibal doesn't get in the way.

Preparations

Chapter Summary

Hannibal teaches Will how to prepare a body. Will makes preparations of his own for the gala.

Hannibal is…conflicted.

On the one hand, he is ecstatic that Will is taking an interest in one of Hannibal's hobbies—the most important one. Will does not enjoy going to the opera; he does not yearn for an expensive meal in an upscale restaurant. He does, however, wish to help Hannibal dissect a body, and this is far more meaningful to Hannibal than any other activity that he and Will can do together.

On the other hand, the timing of Will's request is…suspect. The boy is clearly upset about Hannibal's relationship with Bedelia (inconsequential as that relationship may be) and for Will to ask how to dismember someone as recompense for inviting Bedelia to dinner… Hannibal doesn't know whether to be worried or proud.

(He's proud).

Will had manipulated the situation flawlessly, using Hannibal's desire to invite Bedelia for dinner as a weapon to get what he wanted. Hannibal could kiss the boy for how wonderfully he turned the situation into an opportunity.

Hannibal thinks long and hard about which swine to bring Will for their first (and hopefully not last) dissection together. It needs to be special. Meaningful. Once Will is tucked into bed for the night, Hannibal goes to his rolodex and looks through each and every one of the collected business cards, upset that none seem to be what he is looking for. None of the swine are right for Hannibal's beloved, each pig more dull and unimportant than the last. Eventually, Hannibal gives up on his cards, going instead to his Mind Palace where another collection of names is stored.

Hannibal sorts through those that have wronged his boy in the past, people who don't deserve the gift of dying by Will's perfect hands. Hannibal eventually thinks back to the dinner party he hosted a few months back. He pictures Linda Roche with her low-cut neckline and even lower sense of decorum. The way she badgered Will at dinner and made him feel uncomfortable (the way she flirted with Hannibal and made Will jealous).

She's perfect.

She's also a huge risk.

As part of the upper echelon of Baltimore, Linda lives in a gated community not far from Hannibal, surrounded by security cameras and unnaturally nosy neighbors. A hunt for someone like her usually takes weeks of planning to pull off. But Hannibal doesn't have weeks. He promised Will a body now, and Hannibal will provide.

While Will is still asleep, Hannibal looks up Linda's various social media accounts and checks to see if she is even in Baltimore right now; with her wealth and diminutive attention span, it is highly likely that she is traveling at the moment. Hannibal sees a picture Linda posted last night of herself at a local club, surrounded by other equally empty-headed pigs.

It must be meant to be.

It is unsurprising, really, how easy it is for Hannibal to find the blueprints for her home. Though Hannibal's skill lies in surgical precision rather than digital, he is still adept at navigating through the web until he finds all the information he needs. Not only are there blueprints for Linda's home, there is also a link to the brand of security cameras installed, along with the location of each one. So much information would be dangerous in the hands of the wrong person.

Hannibal is the wrong person.

As Hannibal dons his plastic suit, he thinks on how terribly this entire hunt could go. An unfamiliar pang of worry throbs inside his veins as he zips up his jacket, then slides plastic coverings over his leather oxfords. He is wearing a hat and face mask to keep his identity hidden, a precaution he doesn't usually take but one that he feels is necessary in this specific instance. This hunt must go flawlessly; his darling is relying on him, after all, to *bring home the bacon* as it were.

Hannibal gets into one of his more expensive burner cars and drives down the silent streets of Baltimore, eyes focused on the road. There's a faint glitter of frost over the barren asphalt, and it twinkles and shimmers under the overhead lamps. When Hannibal pulls into the swine's neighborhood, he doesn't worry about turning off the headlights of his car or leaning down in the seat; that would only seem more suspicious, and Hannibal has already learned that acting entitled is the best disguise.

Hannibal presses in the digital code for the gate at the front of the neighborhood (another gift from the internet). There's a golf course down the road from Linda's home, an enormous waste of water and resources when it's far too cold in Baltimore to use for half the year, and Hannibal eyes it with distaste as he nears. Despite its environmental toll, the parking lot of the golf course provides the perfect place for Hannibal to leave his car during his hunt. He parks beneath a few trees, slings a large duffle bag over his shoulder, then walks to the back of Linda's home.

There is a security camera in the back, one that is easily jammed with a deauther. The small device instantly blocks the camera from recording, allowing Hannibal to walk to the back door, pick the lock, and go inside without anyone the wiser.

Inside, the downstairs is packed with gaudy decor, from the polished marble flooring to the golden trim around the baseboards to the chandeliers hanging from the ceiling. Hannibal

takes it all in with an air of disdain, sliding through the living room (literally, as his plastic foot coverings are wonderful at protecting against blood but not slipping) and easily finding the stairwell to the upper floors.

From what Hannibal saw on the blueprints, the master bedroom is nestled at the end of the second floor, connected to an en suite bathroom and walk-in closet much like his own bedroom. Hannibal does not like the thought of having anything in common with this swine —even something as basic as this—but it does prove helpful in planning how he will bring the body out of the bedroom without getting lost in the maze of rooms and hallways upstairs.

Despite what it might project to her friends and acquaintances, this particular swine lives a solitary life, seclusion its constant companion.

Its ultimate downfall.

With ease, Hannibal opens the bedroom door and steps inside, feet immediately sinking into plush carpet. The swine is lying on the enormous bed, surrounded by gold curtains not unlike the ones adorning Hannibal's private jet (another similarity he is loath to admit).

Hannibal walks over to the bed and slips a needle from his pocket, the correct dosage of sedative already prepared, enough to render the pig unconscious without killing it. After all, this is Will's slaughter. The pig will die by his hands or not at all.

With sure hands, Hannibal slides the needle into the swine's carotid artery, amused when its eyes fly open in terror. It attempts to fight back, but Hannibal easily subdues its flailing arms, pinning them to the mattress as he waits for the sedative to take effect. After a minute and thirty-seven seconds, the swine passes out, head falling back to rest in the silk-covered pillows below.

Hannibal lifts the limp body and folds it like a particularly thick coat. The arms and legs are both tied with plastic cables before Hannibal places the folded body into the duffel bag he brought. This pig is small, nearly as short as Will, and Hannibal has no trouble carrying the full duffel bag on his shoulder as he walks back down the stairs.

Again, Hannibal jams the security camera before walking down to his car, a spring in his step at how well the entire morning has gone. Once Hannibal reaches the car, he places the full duffel bag into his trunk, quietly shutting the door before sliding into the driver's seat. He drives home quickly, silently, no music playing this time. His mind is already thinking over how he will prepare this particular body, what organs he will take, what cuts he will guide Will through as they harvest the meat together.

Hannibal parks in the tunnels beneath his home and lifts the duffel bag out of his car, carrying it into his basement. The room is clean as always, the chrome countertops shining, the steel medical table prepped and ready for a body.

Hannibal removes the body from the duffel bag, cutting the plastic bands around its limbs before placing new straps on the unconscious body, tying down each ankle and wrist so there is no way the swine can accidentally fall and spoil the meat. Hannibal wheels over an IV and hooks it into the medial cubital vein in the pig's arm, ensuring that there's a steady flow of

fluids and Hannibal's own private cocktail of paralytic agents into the body. The last thing Hannibal wants is for the thing to start thrashing about as he's showing Will the difference between a liver and a kidney.

Hannibal grabs a large cooler and fills it with ice, placing it next to the metal table so that the harvested organs can go inside before being labeled and placed into the freezer.

Once everything is in order, Hannibal walks up the basement stairs, still fully enshrined in his plastic suit. He opens the door to the pantry and then pauses, surprised to find Will standing in the kitchen, a spoon dangling from his fingertips as he licks up the remains of the Chantilly cream clinging to his lips.

"Darling…" Hannibal murmurs, his brain emptying of all thoughts except that one word.

Will is wearing nothing but a pair of white panties and one of Hannibal's sweaters, the red one that Will loves so much to steal. It hangs over his lithe frame, barely covering the tops of his thighs. His bare toes curl and flex on the kitchen tile, and Hannibal's heart stutters in his chest at the sight (at Will's nervous fidgeting while the boy is clearly trying so hard to look calm and unaffected).

"I thought you would still be in bed," Hannibal says. He walks over to Will and easily plucks the boy up into his arms, annoyed that his plastic suit keeps him from feeling Will's skin against his own. He sets Will onto the kitchen counter, amused when Will whines at the feel of cool chrome beneath his bare thighs, and puts away the boy's dirty dishes, coming back to stand in front of Will. Hannibal slots himself in-between Will's pale, lean legs (his favorite place in the world).

"I couldn't sleep," Will says, still licking at his slick lips. It's far too distracting a sight, and Hannibal forces himself to look into Will's eyes in order to focus.

"And why is that?" Hannibal asks. "Are you nervous, my love? We do not have to do anything that you are not comfortable with."

Will huffs out a breath, and it blows across Hannibal's face, smelling of raspberry parfait and Chantilly cream. "I knew you would say that. I do want to, though. I want to do this. I want to be a part of the preparation. But…I am a little nervous."

"I would be worried if you weren't," Hannibal replies. "I shan't lie to you; from the moment I first saw you, I have envisioned you dripping in blood, standing over your victim as an angel stands over the unworthy it has smitten in righteous fury. But that doesn't mean it has to be now. You are still so young."

Will tilts his head, considering. "How old were you when you killed someone for the first time."

Hannibal's mind is instantly cast back to that horrific winter in Lithuania, the worst months of his life all stacked together like dominoes made of bone and blood. "I was ten," he says. "But there were…exigent circumstances at the time."

“I think there are exigent circumstances now,” Will says. He stares into Hannibal’s eyes (his brave, beautiful boy), not looking away for even a moment. “I love you. You love me. And I want to do this with you. I’m actually…” Will bites down on his bottom lip, something mischievous shining in his eyes. “I’m actually really excited. I guess that officially makes me insane.”

“Then we will be insane together, darling,” Hannibal says. He leans down and presses a soft, slow kiss to Will’s lips, licking away the sweetness that clings to the boy’s mouth. Will’s lips are lush, slick, opening beneath Hannibal like a flower blooming in spring. Hannibal can barely stop himself from continuing the kiss, one taste not enough, the drug of Will’s taste far too potent to shake.

Hannibal picks up Will and sets him back down on the ground. “Why don’t you go change into something more substantial. I have a plastic suit ready for you in the basement. I’ll wait for you here.”

Will rises up on his toes and plants a kiss to Hannibal’s cheek before walking up the stairs, hips swaying in the most delectably mesmerizing way.

As Will is changing, Hannibal pulls out a pre-prepared protein shake from the fridge and drains it in a few long swallows. He will need all his strength to get through the next few hours. There are so many things that can go wrong (and so many things that can go right). Hannibal is proud of how steady his hands are as he finishes his drink, his years as a trauma surgeon allowing him complete control over his body even when his heart is racing and his mind is flying in a thousand different directions.

Will comes back downstairs wearing one of his older flannel shirts, a pair of sweatpants, and his favorite pair of boots.

Hannibal nods in approval and leads Will through the pantry, glancing back at Will as they head downstairs into the basement. Will’s face is blank until he spots the body lying on the table.

“Is that…” Will practically runs over to the body, gaping down at its prone form with something akin to wonder in his eyes.

“It is,” Hannibal says. “I thought it the proper swine for our first harvest together.”

Will turns to face Hannibal, a broad grin sweeping over his face. “Hannibal, she’s *perfect*.”

There’s a manic look in Will’s eyes, a familiar bloodlust that Hannibal echoes in turn. He grins back at Will, and the two of them stand like that for a moment, grinning in anticipation for the murder they are about to commit.

Will eventually steps away from the table, eyeing the smaller plastic suit that hangs next to Hannibal’s spare.

“Is that for me?” Will asks, stepping toward the suit.

Hannibal had the suit made only a few weeks after adopting Will, cautiously optimistic it would be used before Will grew too large for it. As always, Will has surprised Hannibal in his eagerness to participate in Hannibal's hobbies (in the one thing besides Will that truly makes Hannibal feel alive).

"It is. I'll help you put it on; it is quite cumbersome to wear, but we don't want any blood to get on your clothing. Otherwise, the items will have to be burned."

Will nods his understanding and patiently waits for Hannibal to take the jacket off of the hanger that is keeping it dangling above the cement floors. With quick, efficient hands, Hannibal helps Will step into the suit, zipping it up over Will's clothing before helping Will don the plastic shoe covers. When Will is completely covered in plastic, Hannibal stands back to admire his handiwork.

"It will look better with some crimson on it," Will drawls. "The plastic is a little bland."

Hannibal's heart stutters, and he leans forward, unable to help himself from pressing a gentle kiss against the tip of Will's nose. "I couldn't agree more, Mylimasis."

Hannibal pulls on a pair of nitrile gloves, then helps Will put on a pair of his own. Together, they walk back to the metal table in the middle of the room (and the body that is strapped to it).

"What's first?" Will asks. He examines the body with wide eyes that Hannibal could easily get lost in for hours. There is no fear to be found there, not anymore. The cerulean pools of Will's gaze hold many emotions in their depths, but fear is not to be found among the excitement and bloodlust bobbing in the sea of deep blue.

"First," Hannibal says, grabbing a fresh scalpel from the tray sitting near the metal table, "we must wake our guest."

Hannibal adjusts the medication flowing from the IV, and in a matter of moments, the swine is awake and aware on the table. Though meat is far easier to harvest when the swine is unconscious, this particular swine deserves to see who is taking its heart, to see the gift it has been given by having Will as the last thing that graces its eyes before succumbing to death.

The pig is unable to move save for its eyes, eyes which shift back and forth from Hannibal to Will so rapidly that Hannibal is nearly dizzy just from watching.

"Hello," Hannibal croons, stroking a glove-covered hand through the pig's bleach-blonde hair. "It is so kind of you to join us."

The pig tries to squeal, but the paralytic agent running through its veins is powerful. All-consuming. It can do nothing but stare in fear as Hannibal continues to stroke its hair. Though the pig cannot move, it can still certainly feel, and the final few hours of its life will prove to be the most excruciating torture it has ever had the misfortune of bearing.

Hannibal is practically giddy with glee.

“What’s next?” Will breathes, staring back at the pig with unabashed interest. Will cocks his head, curls sliding along the nape of his neck, and traces his eyes from the pig’s face, down its neck until he reaches its torso. “Are we going to cut it open?”

Hannibal grins, handing the scalpel to Will as if it were a bouquet of flowers. An offering of his eternal, undying love. “Would you like to remove its clothing?”

Will stares at the scalpel in Hannibal’s for a moment. Then two. There is no fear in Will’s eyes, but there is hesitation, enough that Hannibal says, “There is no requirement to do this, Will. If you are even slightly uncomfortable, I want you to stop and go upstairs. My love is not contingent on you helping me with my hunting.”

Before Hannibal has finished speaking, Will swipes the scalpel from Hannibal’s upturned palm and grips in his own, much smaller hand.

“I want this,” Will says. He looks up at Hannibal, directly into his eyes. Will looks aflame with new confidence, eyes blazing and fierce as he says, “I *need* this.”

Hannibal would be lying if he said he didn’t feel a curl of arousal thread down his spine at those words. At Will’s voice when he uttered them. His beloved is so perfect, standing there with his plush lips open to accommodate his heavy breathing, a blade clutched in his fist as he waits to slice open his first victim.

“Then let us proceed.”

Hannibal moves so that he is standing behind Will, his front pressed to Will’s back. Will’s curls barely reach Hannibal’s shoulder, and when he wraps his arms around Will, he must bend over a little so that they are aligned. It sends a shudder through Hannibal’s body when he can still feel the heat of Will’s body even through the plastic of their (matching) suits.

Hannibal guides Will’s hand over to the pig’s abdomen, gently directing the boy to slice through its clothing. The silk pajamas easily part beneath the razor-sharp blade, falling on either side of the pig’s torso and landing on the floor. The pants are next, just as easily cut as the top. When the swine is completely naked before them, nothing but a lump of sweating, trembling flesh, Hannibal presses Will forward a step so that there is nary even an inch between them and the metal table where the pig is strapped.

“Are you ready my love?” Hannibal asks. He cannot help himself from burying his nose into Will’s curls, breathing in the scent of Will with the same fervor that an alcoholic breathes in the scent of an open bottle of whiskey.

“Yes,” Will whispers. “I’m ready.”

With steady hands, Hannibal moves Will’s arm until the boy is holding the scalpel directly over the xiphoid process. “We’ll remove the liver first,” he says. “The trick is to cut deep enough to remove the skin without damaging any of the organs below.”

Hannibal presses down on Will’s hand, watching with wonder as Will makes his first cut into flesh. The artificially-tanned skin easily splits, blood welling up on either side of the small

incision.

“Good boy,” Hannibal coos into Will’s ear, breath blowing over his hair and causing it to flutter. “Such a good boy for me.”

Will shudders beneath Hannibal’s hold, and Hannibal feels himself fall further in love with the boy, with everything that Will is and was and will be. Simply knowing that it was not cutting through a body that caused Will to shudder and quake like a trembling leaf but rather words of affection from Hannibal’s tongue is enough to have Hannibal questioning whether it is possible to love someone this much without his heart bursting from being overfilled. The love is so deep, so strong, it feels like a physical ache, a pain that is the sweetest suffering Hannibal has ever felt before. If Will were to leave him, Hannibal would die from the separation because Will is part of Hannibal, just as Hannibal is part of Will. To be apart from Will would be, quite literally, to be apart from himself, and his body would not survive the severance.

“Are we opening the cut wider?” Will asks, voice much lower than normal.

“Yes, darling.” Hannibal forces himself to focus, to show Will everything Hannibal has to offer and more.

They continue to extend their previous cut all the way down the swine’s torso until they reach the small intestines. Both of their hands are now coated in thick blood, crimson spilling between their gloved fingers as Hannibal guides Will into further cutting the skin to open up the abdominal cavity.

“This is the liver,” Hannibal says, pointing to the large organ. “The Greek surgeon Galen believed that part of the soul was located in the liver. He thought it was a seat of perpetual fire that burned through the human body and kept it warm.”

Will huffs out a laugh. “Of course you know that. Sometimes I forget what a nerd you are.”

Hannibal cannot contain his own laugh; here he is, hands buried inside the abdomen of a swine as he teaches his beloved how to harvest organs, and the love of his life is insulting him for his historical medical knowledge.

Hannibal can’t remember a time when he has ever felt happier.

“I will take that as the compliment it is,” Hannibal responds primly, showing Will where the liver connects to the bile duct. They carefully sever the organ, then lift it from the body. Hannibal watches with glee as Will sets the large organ into the cooler sitting next to the table, hands slick with blood.

“Perfect,” Hannibal breathes.

Will looks at Hannibal with a feral grin, one that causes Hannibal’s heart to pound and race beneath his ribs. “I…I like this. It feels like I am providing for you. You are always giving me so many things.” Will gestures to the cooler. “This is something I can give to you.”

Hannibal leans forward and pulls Will into a brutal kiss, biting at the boy's mouth until his lips are swollen and bruised. Hannibal can feel Will's pulse in the delicate skin of his lips, the blood hot and warm as it races beneath the pink skin.

Will returns the kiss with fervor, wrapping his blood-stained hands around Hannibal's neck and pulling Hannibal down so that they are closer, always closer. Will licks into Hannibal's mouth with sure, bold strokes, tongue skimming over each of Hannibal's teeth as if tasting them. When Will's tongue meets Hannibal's own, Hannibal can't help the deep groan that leaves his body.

After a moment, Hannibal forces himself to pull back, gently breaking the grasp Will has around his neck. "Mylimasis," Hannibal breathes, "I wish I could sup from your sweet lips for all of the eternity. Unfortunately, we must finish harvesting the body, lest the meat go and spoil."

Will frowns, lips spit-slick and glistening. "Fine. But I expect you to make it up to me later."

Hannibal smiles and nudges his nose along Will's jaw, breathing in the scent of Will's skin mixed with the smell of fresh blood. It's a heady combination, one Hannibal would gladly breathe in for the rest of time and never grow bored of. "Of course, darling. Whatever you desire, it shall be yours."

Will walks back over to the table, and Hannibal follows, positioning himself once more behind Will.

It takes longer than normal to harvest the organs, each carefully plucked and packed into ice. Hannibal does not regret a single instant, in love with the rhythm he and Will find. Each cut is like a dance, a graceful pull and push as Hannibal and Will move as one.

Eventually, all of the organs are harvested, save for one.

"When we remove the heart, it will die," Hannibal says.

Will turns and looks back at Hannibal. He has flecks of crimson over his face, a bloody constellation that brings out the blue in his eyes. Hannibal can't help the smile that overtakes his face at the sight.

"I'm ready," Will responds.

Together, they crack open the rib cage, exposing the sluggishly beating heart. It whimpers rather than beats, each contraction a weak echo of the pounding heart sitting inside Hannibal's own chest. Will is vicious with the scalpel, slicing through arteries and veins without a hint of hesitation.

Blood spews forth from the open wounds, and the swine finally dies, a choked-off moan its last rites. Will lifts the heart into the air and turns to face Hannibal with a triumphant gleam in his eyes.

“We did it,” he whispers. A drop of blood caresses Will’s pale cheek, landing in the corner of his mouth. Hannibal leans forward and licks it away, wrinkling his nose at the taste, so different from Will’s own sweetly spiced blood.

“ *You* did it,” Hannibal says. Will sets the heart into the cooler, and Hannibal places the entire container into his freezer, content to process the organs at a later time. When Hannibal faces Will again, he’s surprised to find the boy leaning over the quickly-cooling corpse, the dripping scalpel still clenched in his blood-soaked fist.

With quick, brutal movements, Will stabs the out eyes of the swine, plunging the blade into the sockets over and over until there is nothing but a pile of flesh and vitreous left.

Hannibal tilts his head, curious, watching as Will stares at his work with a pleased expression on his face. Hidden beneath that pleasure is…jealousy?

“What are you thinking of, darling?” Hannibal asks. Like so many times before, Hannibal wishes he could read Will’s thoughts, wishes he could crack open his beloved's brain and see each individual neuron as it fires across the web of Will’s mind in creation of his thoughts.

“She looked at you,” Will says. His shoulders rise and fall with each of his heavy breaths. “That night at the party. She kept looking at you and showing off her body and *touching* you.” Will faces Hannibal, fangs bared. “You’re *mine*.”

There is no hiding Hannibal’s arousal now. The front of his trousers sport a prominent bulge that is easily seen beneath the clear plastic suit. Will, sensing a change in Hannibal’s mood, flicks his eyes down until they land on Hannibal’s erection.

With a snarl, Will runs over to Hannibal and pulls him down into another brutal kiss, more teeth than tongue as their bodies meld together. Hannibal tears off his gloves, *finally* feeling Will’s skin against his own. He runs his hands over Will’s blood-soaked face, tracing the drops of red and smearing them over Will’s creamy skin, the perfect blank canvas for the crimson ink of their art.

“Beautiful,” Hannibal says, leaning down to suck a bruise into Will’s skin, once again wrinkling his nose at the taste of the swine’s blood. Hannibal sighs and moves back from Will, drawing a finger along the boy’s exposed canine. “But you taste much better without the blood of a swine covering your perfect skin.”

“Then you better clean me off,” Will growls, eyes pitch-black.

Hannibal groans at the order, lifting Will into his arms and carrying him up the basement stairs. They kiss the entire way to the bedroom, not stopping until they reach the shower, and only then do they part to remove the rest of their bloody clothing. Will (for once) follows Hannibal’s lead and folds his clothing before placing them on the vanity rather than simply throwing the items onto the floor.

Once naked, they enter the shower and turn on the faucet without waiting for the water to heat. Hannibal stands in front of the stream, taking the brunt of the icy water until it turns

warm. Will stands in front of him, eyes still black, licking his lips as he gazes over Hannibal's bare body.

"God, you're so hot," Will says. He reaches forward and runs a hand through Hannibal's chest hair, smearing blood into the dark curls. Will moans at the sight, leaning forward to nuzzle Hannibal's chest before drawing one of the man's nipples into his mouth and sucking on it.

Hannibal chokes out a moan, gripping a hand into Will's curls and forcing the boy to remain there. The water on Hannibal's back turns from warm to hot, and Hannibal feels as though he is being swallowed up by flames, consumed on both sides by slick, wet heat. Will continues sucking on Hannibal's nipple, teeth nipping the delicate skin with more force than is comfortable. Hannibal's hips roll at the pain, and his head goes cloudy with want.

"Will," Hannibal moans, voice echoing off the tiles. "Your mouth…"

Will leans back and grins, face still coated with blood. "My mouth?" He bares his teeth and nips at Hannibal's stomach, digging his teeth into the soft flesh of Hannibal's torso. The bite stings, the pain only amplified by the hot water that immediately runs over the raw mark. The pain mixes with the pleasure, all of it swirling in Hannibal's mind like the bloody water swirling down the drain.

Hannibal tugs on Will's hair, forcing the boy to look up. His beloved looks surreal, almost supernatural like this, curls mussed by water and blood, face painted with crimson, eyes black, teeth bared. Like a creature from old, brought to life by Hannibal's hands. The thought fills Hannibal with pride. *He* created this perfect creature. *He* found Will. Molded him with steady hands. Developed his taste for blood and flesh in every way that a person can be sated by such things. And now Will is here, choking with lust, just begging to be taken by Hannibal. Owned by him, completely and thoroughly.

"Will you fill me up?" Will asks, removing himself from Hannibal's grip. He kneels down in the shower, knees hitting the bottom of the tub with a dull *thud*. "Mark me? Show me how thoroughly you own me?"

Hannibal forgets, sometimes, just how powerful Will's empathy is. It's almost as if Will is reading Hannibal's mind, plucking the thoughts from his brain and then serving them back to him on a silver platter. "Yes, darling. I'll give you everything you need."

Will shivers, running his hands along Hannibal's powerful thighs. His fingers drag across the thick hair covering his legs, and Hannibal moans when Will sharply tugs on it, drawing Hannibal even closer.

"Give it to me."

Hannibal tugs on Will's scalp, forcing Will to lean back so that his spine is arched, head tilted up to look into Hannibal's eyes. When Hannibal is sure that Will is paying attention, he releases Will's hair and uses his hand to trace over Will's cheek, the touch gentle. Teasing.

Nothing like Will needs. Not enough to cure the racing desire flooding his veins, the itch beneath his skin that demands to be sated.

Will wants to *hurt*.

And only Hannibal is allowed to hurt him.

Without warning, Hannibal wrenches open Will's jaw, forcing it to extend so far that Will hears a popping sound in his cheek. While Will is still reeling from the sudden pressure, Hannibal slams his erection into Will's open mouth, shoving his cock inside until the thick head breaches Will's throat and lodges deep into his esophagus.

Will chokes, gasps, eyes watering as all the oxygen is taken from his lungs. Hannibal gives him no time to adjust, pulling his cock out halfway from Will's mouth only to immediately thrust back in. Will's gag reflex is screaming, desperate to get away from the sudden intrusion. Will's brain, however, is flooded with the blessed relief at finally, *finally* being filled.

Will clutches at Hannibal's hairy thighs, hands slipping from the skin as water sluices down their bodies from the shower. Everything is so hot, steam rising and clouding Will's vision even more than the tears in his eyes.

"Take it," Hannibal grunts, using both of his hands to grip Will's hair tight. "I'll give you *exactly* what you need. Fill you up so that every breath you take is only me, every thought is only me, every *nerve* in your body is only perfectly tuned to me. You and I are one now, Will."

Will moans around Hannibal's cock, saliva spilling from his lips as the thick cock keeps ramming into his throat. Will forces himself to breathe through his nose, to shudder out a breath when Hannibal leaves his mouth for a second before slamming back in. Still, Will's head becomes light-headed far too quickly. It floats away on waves of pleasure and pain that intertwine until Will cannot tell which is which.

Hannibal's precum smears over Will's tongue, coating it in that unique bitter-sweet tang that Will loves so much. Will's eyes roll back into his head as Hannibal's thrusts get slicker and slicker, precum pouring from the head of his cock and coating Will's mouth and throat.

The vein on the underside of Hannibal's cock throbs in time with the man's heartbeat. His erection is so hot, burning against the inside of Will's body as it is shoved in and out and in and out again. Hannibal's breaths became pants, short bursts of air that leave his body like the beating of an eagle's wings.

Will releases Hannibal's thigh with one of his hands, reaching down to grab his own aching erection.

"No," Hannibal growls, tugging sharply on Will's curls. "You come from my cock or not at all."

Will keens, trembling at the arousal that pulses through his veins at the words.

Hannibal continues pounding into Will's face, uncaring of the boy's pleasure. Will's eyes continue to stream, and tears mix with the blood still dotting his face. Will can see the blood-soaked liquid smear into Hannibal's pubic hair, dripping onto his balls. Each thrust of Hannibal's cock into Will's mouth causes Will's nose to be shoved into the wiry pubic hair, and Will can't help but moan at the musky smell, so incredibly turned-on he feels as though he might burst from the pleasure.

Hannibal's cock suddenly disappears, and Will whines, cold and empty where he had just been hot and full.

"Hush," Hannibal coos, lifting Will up by the shoulders and spinning him around so that he is the one facing the shower head instead of Hannibal. "I will take care of you."

Will can't respond, his throat sore and aching, his head fuzzy and empty save for thoughts of Hannibal's cock.

"Please," Will moans, arching his back and pushing his ass towards Hannibal in an effort to tempt the man into doing something, anything. "Please fill me with your cum."

Hannibal growls from behind him, wrapping a muscular arm around Will's trim waist and pulling Will back so that he is flush with Hannibal's body. The water pours down on them both, and the remaining droplets of blood flecked across Will's skin wash away, turning the water beneath them a light pink before it becomes clear once more.

"What would happen if I pushed inside you now, without any preparation, hm? Would I split your tiny hole? Wreck it, destroy it until it is always gaping open, desperate to be filled?"

Will whines, throwing back his head and exposing his neck to Hannibal. Hannibal immediately leans down to bite at Will's throat, teeth grazing against the skin without breaking it. Will trembles, shakes, desperate for Hannibal to leave him marked so that anyone who looks at Will will see exactly who owns him.

"Please," Will begs again. "I need you."

Hannibal nips at Will's ear, tugging on the lobe with sharp teeth, before pulling away. He pushes Will forward so that Will has to plant his hands on the shower wall in order not to fall, then spreads Will's legs apart, baring his hole to Hannibal's gaze. Hot water pours over Will's body, and yet Will feels cold without Hannibal around him (inside him).

"So beautiful, darling. Always so beautiful." Hannibal runs his hands over Will's ass, broad palms cupping Will's cheeks and gentle squeezing. Will sways his hips back and forth, arching further into the touch.

With a growl, Hannibal slides his hand down and begins to push against Will's tight ring, sliding the tip of his finger into Will's hole.

"*Yes*!" Will cries, so happy to finally be filled.

The water helps ease the way for Hannibal's finger, but it is nowhere near as helpful as lube. The slide of Hannibal's fingertip burns against Will's clenched rim, and Will forces himself to relax, to let Hannibal inside.

Hannibal adds a second finger, forcing it in with the first. The sudden intrusion sends a flame licking up Will's spine, and he arches his back, the pleasure-pain a drug that Will feels he will always be addicted to.

"Another," Will whines. "I can take it."

Hannibal slaps Will's ass, the sound of it loudly ringing inside the shower. "I decide what you can take, Mylimasis. Not you."

Will's eyes roll back into his head at the words, body shaking as Hannibal continues to finger him open. Hannibal purposely steers clear of Will's prostate, the soft pads of his fingertips stroking Will's inner walls everywhere but where Will wants them to be.

Eventually, Hannibal adds a third finger. He stretches them apart inside of Will, spreading his rim wider and wider, each flex of Hannibal's fingers another lick of fire up Will's spine. Will whines, keens, pushing his ass out as far as possible, begging in every way he knows how for Hannibal to *fuck* him.

"Please," Will slurs, tears streaming down his face. The water is still pouring hot from the showerhead (of course Hannibal would never buy a house that didn't have an endless supply of hot water), and Will feels lightheaded from the steam curling in the air, from the want curling in his gut. "I need your cock. *J'ai besoin de toi*."

Hannibal's fingers stutter, stop. He lets out a deep groan, and Will barely has a moment to breathe before Hannibal is *slamming* his cock inside of Will, pelvis knocking against Will's ass and causing it to jiggle. Will can feel Hannibal's heavy balls slapping against his skin, can feel his pubic hair scratching against the smooth skin of Will's lower back, can feel the head of Hannibal's throbbing cock as it pushes so *deep* inside of him.

Will throws his head back and lets out a loud cry, so overcome he can't do anything but take it, take everything that Hannibal gives him.

And Hannibal gives him so *much*.

"You take me so *well* , Mylimasis," Hannibal moans, slamming in again and again. The sounds of their coupling are incredibly loud, so wet with the water pouring from the shower. Each slap of Hannibal's pelvis against Will's ass is like a gunshot in the quiet bathroom. "I wish I could crawl beneath your skin, place myself so deeply inside of you that I could never be removed."

"You are," Will gasps. Each breath is punched from his body by the force of Hannibal's thrusts. "You are inside me. Always. We are one now, remember?"

Hannibal slows the pace of his hips, grinding into Will rather than ramming. "Yes, darling," he coos. Hannibal leans down to nuzzle at Will's ear, kissing the soft skin behind it. "Just us.

Forever.”

The head of Hannibal’s cock presses into Will’s prostate, searing him with all-consuming pleasure. There is nowhere for Will to turn, no way to escape the onslaught of bliss as Hannibal continues rutting against the most sensitive spot inside of Will.

Hannibal kisses down Will’s wet curls, stopping at the nape of Will’s neck. Not stopping in his slow grinds, Hannibal sucks a bruising mark into Will’s skin, sucking up the water pouring over it and licking away the droplets as they appear.

Will whines and tilts his head forward, exposing more of his skin for Hannibal to mark. He’s close, so incredibly close. He’s full of Hannibal’s cock, full of his love, and he only needs something slightly more to tip him over the edge.

“Hurt me,” Will whispers. “I’m so close.”

Hannibal growls, snaps his hips forward. He reaches a hand around Will’s torso and brings it up to Will’s pebbled nipples. Will doesn’t have time to react before Hannibal is twisting one of them, fingernails biting deep into the tender flesh until Will is whining against the throbbing, stabbing pain.

Will looks down and mewls at the sight of blood coating Hannibal’s fingertips. Will’s blood, not the blood of some unworthy swine.

With a trembling hand, Will lets go of the wall and grabs Hannibal’s fingers, bringing them to his mouth. He sucks his blood off of Hannibal’s flesh, and the taste of his blood combined with the salty taste of Hannibal’s skin is enough to have Will coming, spilling his seed against the tile wall.

Will’s hole clenches against Hannibal’s erection, loud slurping sounds ringing in the small space. Hannibal thrusts a few more times before coming himself, spilling deep inside of Will and filling him with hot, thick cum. It spreads inside of Will, a warmth that is as addicting as it is freeing.

They stay like that for a moment, completely locked together, before Hannibal slips out of Will. Will whines at the loss (at the feeling of Hannibal’s cum trickling out of his hole and down his legs, swirling down the shower drain instead of filling Will up). Hannibal shushes Will, spinning the boy so that they are again facing one another.

Hannibal leans down and licks at the remaining droplets of blood still framing Will’s nipple. Each lave of Hannibal’s tongue against Will’s raw skin feels like a hot coal being pressed against his flesh, and Will squirms beneath Hannibal’s ministrations, the pleasure-pain almost too much in his post-orgasmic haze.

Hannibal licks one final time before shutting off the water and helping Will out of the shower. Will feels like a newborn colt, legs shaky and unsteady as Hannibal dries him off with a ridiculously fluffy towel.

Will grabs his folded clothing off the counter, following Hannibal out of the bathroom and into their bedroom. They both walk into the closet, still slightly damp as they put on their clothing.

“What will you do with the rest of the body?” Will asks, sliding into the same pair of sweatpants he had worn beneath his plastic suit; the suit had done its job well as not a single drop of blood had ended up on Will’s clothes. Will watches Hannibal change into his own clothing, making sure the man is thoroughly distracted before Will reaches into his folded flannel shirt and draws out the scalpel he placed there (the one he slipped into the sleeve of his shirt after removing the pig’s eyes). Will hides the scalpel in the insole of a pair of tennis shoes he rarely wears, certain Hannibal will not find it before Will uses it again.

Hannibal’s back is still turned, all of his glorious muscles on display for Will’s greedy eyes for a (sadly short) moment before they are covered by a fresh undershirt.

“I might keep its legs,” Hannibal says, finally turning to face Will. His eyes are almost dreamy as he says, “The rest of it is nothing. You were so wonderful at collecting its organs, darling. I do not require anything further from it.”

Will smiles shyly, ducking his head at the praise. It fills him with warmth (with that same righteous anger that filled him the moment he saw Linda’s body strapped to the table in Hannibal’s basement). She is gone forever, and now her body will nourish the both of them. Sate them so much better than her company ever did.

“Okay. Do you need any help with that?”

“No, beloved.” Hannibal slips on a sweater, then runs a tender hand through Will’s damp curls. “You should go back to sleep. We’ve had a long morning. Harvesting a body expends more energy than one might think.”

Will’s muscles are slightly sore, a pleasant sort of pain that winds through his arms and legs and ends in the small of his back. Though perhaps the soreness is from the pounding he just received and not from the swine.

“Okay.” Will leans up on his toes and places a kiss to Hannibal’s plush lips. “You better join me as soon as you can. I can’t sleep well without you.”

Hannibal smiles, completely besotted, and nods his head. “Of course. I won’t linger for a moment longer than is necessary.”

Pleased, Will walks over to their bed and slips beneath the covers, luxuriating in the stretch of his muscles as he twists and turns. Will eventually settles, curling up into a ball facing Hannibal’s side of the bed. The sheets and pillow smell like him (like spice and musk and every good thing), and the scent calms Will, soothing him as he begins to drift into a light sleep.

Hannibal does eventually join Will, spooning him as soon as he slips into the bed, surrounding Will with warmth. They rise around noon, eating a late breakfast and spending

the rest of the day in quiet companionship. Hannibal begins teaching Will how to play the harpsichord, and Will teaches Hannibal the best way to craft a lure for a snapper.

For dinner that night, Hannibal prepares the heart of the swine. He removes each of the large veins and arteries, rinsing out the frozen blood still remaining inside the inner chambers and walls. Will's own heart stops when Hannibal slices the organ in two, neatly cleaving it in half before setting both halves on a tray for braising.

Will helps by cutting the carrots and onions, placing the chopped vegetables into the pan along with some apple cider. By the time the heart is roasting inside of the oven, Will's palms are sweaty and his cheeks are flushed.

"Will," Hannibal murmurs, standing in front of the oven and blocking Will's view of the roasting heart. "Are you alright, darling? You seem rather…preoccupied."

Will licks his lips, glancing up at Hannibal's face. "Don't pretend, Hannibal. I know you can smell my emotions."

Hannibal grins, shark-like, and bends to place his nose in the juncture of Will's neck. "Shall I tell you what I can smell then, hm?" Will is shaking, trembling, grasping at Hannibal's shoulders as if they are the only thing keeping him upright (and perhaps they are). "I can smell your anticipation. It's still a new scent for you. It smells like the charged air before a storm. Electric. Powerful."

"What else?" Will whispers. "What else can you smell?"

Hannibal takes another deep breath, lips caressing Will's neck with the subtle motion. "I smell your pride like burning incense. Smoky. Heady."

There's one more. One more emotion that Hannibal has yet to name. They both know what Will is really feeling in this moment, what Will has felt since the moment Hannibal arrived in the kitchen with the frozen heart held between his perfect fingers.

"I smell arousal," Hannibal breathes out. "Your body is screaming out with lust. It smells like glacial air. I feel as though I could cut myself on the blade of your desire."

Will keens, throwing back his head and clutching at the fabric of Hannibal's sweater with white knuckles.

Hannibal sucks Will down right there, in the kitchen, the heart of their victim roasting only a few feet to their left. When Will comes (and he does so embarrassingly fast), Hannibal licks each and every drop from his lips, savoring the taste with a look of ecstasy in his maroon eyes. Will wants to return the favor, but the oven timer goes off, and Hannibal insists they eat while the heart is still steaming.

Will sucks Hannibal down after dinner, Hannibal's seed the most delicious dessert Will could ever ask for.

The next week, Hannibal takes Will shopping again for *another* new suit.

“Hannibal,” Will complains, staring at the endless stack of fabric samples on the table to their right. “I already have half a dozen suits that fit me. Why would I need more?”

Hannibal looks at Will with barely concealed amusement, selecting a shade of blue fabric and holding it against Will’s face. “Darling, this suit is for the gala on my birthday. It’s more a present for me than for you. Don’t you want to make me happy?”

Manipulative bastard.

“Yes, Hannibal,” Will sighs. “I want to make you happy.”

“Wonderful.” Hannibal selects another swatch of fabric (and another and another) before they finally leave the store, Hannibal carrying a bag full of mysterious items that he refuses to show Will (and Will would be lying if he didn’t secretly hope it was more lingerie).

The day of the gala dawns snowy and cold. Outside, heavy clouds dump snow and ice onto Hannibal’s small yard, and when Will goes outside to bask in it for a moment, he notices that the roof of the house looks like it is coated in a layer of white icing.

Hannibal goes to work with Bedelia as per usual for a Friday. Will remains at home, working on his Italian. His French is now almost completely fluent, and Will takes great pleasure in speaking with Hannibal in French, listening to the dulcet sounds of Hannibal’s voice mix with his own (much sloppier) pronunciation (though Hannibal doesn’t seem to care if Will stumbles in his grammar when Hannibal is plowing him from behind, both of them screaming their ecstasy in slurred French).

Hannibal comes home early to prepare for the gala, which Will finds only slightly ridiculous (after all, he has his own preparations to make).

“Is this really necessary?” Will asks as Hannibal runs more gel through Will’s unruly curls. The slick gel turns the curls from a chocolate brown to nearly black, and the gel causes them to shine and glisten beneath the vanity lights as Hannibal continues his work.

“Yes, darling. You are the most beautiful creature ever to exist. It would be a sin not to realize your full potential. When you are on my arm tonight, I want the entire world to know that I, and I alone, am in possession of the most stunning creature at the gala.”

Will blushes a bright red, forcing himself to look away from his reflection in the mirror.

Despite his shyness and poor self-esteem, Will can (tentatively) admit that he *does* look good. His hair is now perfectly styled due to Hannibal’s tenacity (and the power of his ridiculously expensive hair gel), the slick curls parting across his pale forehead like a wave. His nose and cheeks are flushed that damned crimson that comes from Hannibal’s compliments, the color only highlighting the blue of his eyes. His entire face is healthy now, filled out from months of eating Hannibal’s lovingly prepared food. The collar of his white shirt is crisp, pressing against his collarbones and making him look refined. His light blue suit is the same cerulean shade as his eyes, and it fits his body seamlessly, every stitch tailored to his form.

And all of it is thanks to Hannibal.

Will turns and presses a kiss to Hannibal's cheek, not hiding how deeply he breathes in the scent of Hannibal's delicious smelling aftershave.

"You always smell so good," Will moans, nuzzling his nose further into Hannibal's face. He draws his nose across Hannibal's sharp cheekbone, tucking it into the curve of Hannibal's jaw. There's a hint of stubble, a shadow of hair that Hannibal has left that is driving Will wild with lust.

"My Will," Hannibal murmurs, "if you keep touching me like that then we will not make it to the gala on time."

"And what a shame that would be," Will drawls, sucking a small mark beneath the collar of Hannibal's shirt. Will hates that he has to hide his marks, but it still thrills him to know they are there (to know that if anyone were stupid enough to touch what is his, they would be met with the sight of Will's possession).

"I had hoped that you might be less of a brat this evening. It is my birthday after all." Hannibal looks down at Will, eyes shimmering with amusement.

"Then I suppose you don't know me as well as you thought," Will replies cheekily. He pecks one last kiss to Hannibal's stubbled jaw and leaves the bathroom, walking into the closet. Will is quick, silent as he fetches the scalpel from it's been sitting oh-so innocently inside of his shoe the past few weeks.

The blade is sharp, cleaned of any remaining flesh from its last victim. For Will's plan tonight to work, there cannot be a trace of Linda on the blade, nothing that could tie Hannibal's previous victims to Will's future one.

Will pockets the blade, its weight a comforting thing inside of Will's suit jacket. It sits next to the alcohol wipes Will pilfered from the bathroom, another key to Will's plan.

He did not buy Hannibal anything for his birthday; the man has more money than a king, and there is nothing in this world he couldn't buy if he wanted. No, Will's present is far more tailored to Hannibal than anything he has been given before. And it must be delivered perfectly if Hannibal is to fully enjoy it.

"Darling, is everything alright?" Hannibal calls.

Will curses himself for getting lost inside of his own thoughts, quickly exiting the closet and walking back into the bedroom.

"I'm fine," he says. "Still planning how I can get out of attending the gala with you tonight. How do you feel about arson?"

Hannibal walks out of the bedroom, one eyebrow quirked. "I am generally opposed to the idea. I really think you are worrying far too much about tonight. This evening will only be slightly more socially forward than the opera. And I promise that you do not have to utter a single word. Merely keep me company."

“More like keep you sane,” Will snorts, tugging his dress shoes over his black socks. “I can only imagine how many times you’ve collected a new business card at an event like tonight.”

“More times than is probably wise,” Hannibal admits. He sits next to Will on the bed, stroking a finger over Will’s cheek.

Will’s skin tingles beneath the light touch, and Will sighs, resting his head against Hannibal’s broad shoulder.

Hannibal leans into the touch, then says, “Bedelia will be there tonight. Is that going to be an issue?”

Will grins, all teeth, and shakes his head. “No. I am happy that she’ll be there. I’m looking forward to talking to her. I should apologize to her for how rudely I behaved during our dinner together.”

Hannibal is clearly surprised by Will’s answer, but he doesn’t say anything in response, merely helps Will put on his cuff links before they head downstairs together.

Once in the car, Hannibal turns on the radio to his favorite classical music station. Will smiles as Hannibal hums along to the familiar tune, his low voice rumbling in the car like the thrum of the engine.

“You have such a nice voice,” Will says, leaning his head against the window so he can fully look at Hannibal. “I love listening to it.”

Hannibal’s cheek flush a light pink, the shade not unlike the color of cotton candy. Will wants to kiss Hannibal’s cheeks, feel the rush of blood beneath Hannibal's soft skin, lick the pulse on the man’s neck and then dig his teeth into the flesh until it parts and coats Will’s tongue in sweet, sticky blood.

“Thank you, Mylimasis,” Hannibal replies. His accent is thicker than normal, caressing each syllable as it leaves his mouth. “I enjoy the sound of your voice as well. It is…soothing to me.” A pause. Then, “It sounds like home.”

Now it’s Will’s turn to blush. He turns away from Hannibal, lest Hannibal see the absolute love-sick expression on Will’s face. Will feels like there is a parade of butterflies in his stomach, their wings beating a damning rhythm beneath his ribs, and he can’t help the smile that blossoms over his face in response.

The gala is being held at a fancy hotel downtown, somewhere that Will would have been immediately thrown out of for merely looking at it this same time last year. The building is tall, towering over the landscape like a metal and glass sentinel. Will’s neck hurts from craning back to see the top, and Hannibal has to guide him from the car, a hand pressed to his back as they walk toward the front door.

“Thank you for joining me tonight,” Hannibal says, slowly leading Will up the steps (almost as if he is leading him toward the slaughterhouse. Will certainly feels as though that is where

he is heading). “It means the world to me that you would put your own comfort aside to ensure that I am not alone.”

Will looks up Hannibal. He is so handsome like this, chiseled jaw framed by the glow of a dozen streetlights. His hair is slicked back, parted down the side in a sharp line. His nose is tilted up slightly, aristocratic in its bearing, and Will can hardly breathe when his eyes finally meet Hannibal’s own, maroon nearly black under the evening sky.

“I will always be here for you,” Will says. “I love you.”

Hannibal smiles, something small and delicate (something just for Will). “I love you as well, darling. More than words can ever express.”

There’s a loud noise behind them, the hum of a large crowd as they exit their cars and press toward the entrance.

Will places a hand over his breast pocket, taking comfort in feeling the weight of the scalpel lying there, biding its time. Will sighs, squares his shoulders, and takes a step forward.

“Let’s do this.”

The Gala

Chapter Summary

Hannibal and Will attend the gala. Will gifts Hannibal his birthday present.

There is a certain feeling of…intoxication at having Will clinging to Hannibal's arm as they walk through the entrance of the hotel. Heads turn their way, a wave of fake smiles and unbridled desire swarming over Hannibal as he walks down the foyer and into the banquet hall. Will is silent at his side, looking every bit the part of the perfect, complacent son.

Will senses Hannibal's pride. Hannibal can tell from the way Will squeezes the juncture of his elbow, the touch just shy of painful. Hannibal forces his mask to stay firmly in place, suppressing the urge to smile. He is so happy now, so incredibly in love that it is hard to keep it inside. But keep it inside he must; his relationship with Will is far too precious (too precarious) to risk exposing because of a single simple smile.

A man stands apart from the crowd of simpering swine, a glass of port already held in his hands. He greets Hannibal with far too much familiarity, smiling at Hannibal as if they are long-lost friends reuniting after years apart rather than distant colleagues with lukewarm regard (perhaps less than lukewarm in Hannibal's case).

"Dr. Chilton," Hannibal greets, voice perfectly pleasant. He releases his elbow from Will's hold (immediately regretting the loss), and offers out a hand for Frederick to shake. "I was wondering if you might make an appearance tonight."

"And risk missing out on the greatest networking event of the season? Certainly not."

Ah, there is the Dr. Chilton that Hannibal knows so well. Uncouth. Uninspiring. And certainly unmistakable in his desire to talk to Will. The man is practically salivating at the mouth, no doubt eager to hear if the rumors of Will's empathy are as astounding as he's heard from the words of whatever eager pig delivering the proffered gossip claimed them to be.

Though Will's empathy is a gift for Hannibal and Hannibal alone, there is no small part of him that delights in the ability to show off what Will can do (what Will does for Hannibal because Hannibal *owns* him, completely and fully).

"This is my son, Will," Hannibal offers.

Will extends his palm, grip somewhat limp as he shakes Frederick's hand. Will stares at Frederick's chin rather than his eyes, a small pout gracing the boy's perfectly plump lips.

"It's nice to meet you," Will says. He turns his eyes to glare at Hannibal, no doubt a reprimand for making him speak.

Hannibal merely smiles back, serene.

“I’ve heard so much about you,” Frederick says. He leans forward, bending his knees slightly so that he is eye-level with Will (as though talking to some infant rather than the smartest person in the room). “Is it true what they say? That you can know a person’s thoughts simply by looking at them?” His tone is nasally. Condescending.

That stops now.

Hannibal clears his throat, then places a firm hand on Will’s back. He is immediately rewarded when Will leans back into the solid touch. “Dr. Chilton, please. My son is not here to be psychoanalyzed.” The only person allowed to see Will’s magnificent brain is, of course, Hannibal. Not some bumbling, incompetent fool like Chilton. He would stick his blundering fingers into Will’s brain and scramble it in an attempt to understand, and only because Will is extraordinary would the boy be able to recover from such an experiment.

“Sorry, sorry. My apologies. Now that you are in the psychiatric field as well, Dr. Lecter, I am sure you understand how difficult it can be to separate business from pleasure.”

Chilton looks at Hannibal as though expecting him to agree with every word that crosses his lips.

Hannibal tilts his head downward, an acceptance of the apology without actually acknowledging the man. “How is the world of psychiatry treating you, Dr. Chilton? Do you regret your switch?”

As much as it pains Hannibal to admit, he and Chilton are quite similar in regards to the trajectory of their careers. Both made the switch from medicine to psychiatry, though Hannibal refuses to accept that the work he does is anywhere near the level of drivel that Chilton performs.

They continue talking for a while, swapping stories of their time in scrubs and how different it is to working in a suit. Will remains by Hannibal’s side, a silent figure, eyes locked to the ground. Chilton glances at Will—completely unsubtle—every few moments as if to see whether the boy has magically disappeared, perhaps another “trick” of his psyche.

By the time Chilton leaves to find another victim to hold hostage, Will is practically sagging against Hannibal’s waist, shoulders drooping with exhaustion.

“How long are we staying again?” Will mutters, burying his face in Hannibal’s side for a moment.

Hannibal reaches a hand down and strokes the boy’s hair, careful not to displace his curls (which Hannibal had spent a significant amount of time taming before their arrival). “Only a few hours, darling. It will be over before you know it.”

Will sniffs, clearly not believing a word that Hannibal says (after all Will *is* smarter than any of his or Hannibal’s peers). “I didn’t like him. Dr. Chilton, I mean. I thought he might start slobbering the moment he saw me.”

Hannibal laughs, hiding it behind a cough. He guides Will over to where their names have been printed onto white placards and placed atop fabric napkins on a table. They sit down, Hannibal pulling Will's chair back for him with care, and Will looks straight into Hannibal's eyes the moment they are seated. Waiting for his reply. Hannibal would be lying if he didn't say the attention is unfairly addictive. Everything about Will is.

"The unremarkable are always drawn to the remarkable. They are like moths to a flame; they know the fire will burn them. Consume them. But a violent death is better than the slow, treacherous slip into oblivion."

Will bites down on his bottom lip, and Hannibal is helpless to look anywhere but the press of white teeth against plush, pink skin. "How did he know about my empathy? I definitely haven't been talking about it to people."

Hannibal leans back in his chair, crossing a leg over his knee. "I have discussed your empathy with Bedelia. Not in detail, of course. The nuances of how your beautiful mind works are something that belong only to me."

Will shivers at Hannibal's tone (at his words), pupils dilating until there is only a small ring of cerulean left in his eyes. Will reaches out to lay his hand over Hannibal's on top of the table. Hannibal cannot help himself from turning his hand palm up, accepting the touch (wishing for more).

Behind Hannibal, someone clears their throat. Hannibal sighs and stands from his chair, turning to find Lisa, Bedelia's assistant, hovering near their table with an impish grin drawn over her face. She is wearing a rather scandalous gown for this type of event, the front cut far too low and the slit over her leg cut far too high. Either she doesn't notice the stares she is getting or she doesn't care (or, perhaps, she is aware and delights in the attention that her dress causes her to receive).

"Ms. Clark," Hannibal greets. "How delightful you could join us this evening. I am assuming you arrived at the gala with Dr. Du Maurier?"

Lisa frowns slightly at the mention of Bedelia's name before quickly clearing the look away, face unnaturally cheerful once more. "Yes. She is talking to an old colleague of hers. She sent me ahead to find our nameplates." Lisa looks down at the table where Hannibal and Will are sitting, face breaking into another grin when she sees her and Bedelia's names printed among the cutlery and plates.

"Looks like we'll be sitting together," Lisa says.

Behind Hannibal, he hears Will let out a long, drawn-out breath.

"I believe you have already met my son," Hannibal says, eager to direct his attention back to Will, to stop looking at Lisa (to stop looking at anyone who isn't his beloved). "Will has graciously agreed to accompany me this evening."

Lisa barely flicks a glance over Hannibal's shoulder, eyes sliding over Will with marked disinterest, before snapping back to Hannibal's face. "That's so sweet of you. It's nice to see

a father stepping up and taking responsibility for his child."

A short bark of laughter from Will. Hannibal takes the backhanded compliment and chews on it for a moment, imagining he is chewing on Lisa's overlined lips instead.

"Thank you," Hannibal eventually says. "I take my duties as a parent very seriously. I care for Will as much as I care for myself."

Lisa coos and places a hand over heart, tilting her hip slightly closer to Hannibal's own torso. "So sweet."

Before Hannibal can come up with an intelligent response to that particular piece of drivel, Bedelia appears like an angel waiting in the wings, bringing with her the hope of rational conversation and at least more than one functioning brain cell.

"Dr. Du Maurier," Hannibal greets, drawing Lisa's attention (blessedly) away from him, if only for a moment. "You look wonderful this evening."

Hannibal does not miss the way Lisa's upper lip curls at the compliment, though he ignores it completely.

"Dr. Lecter," Bedelia says, eyes sweeping over his frame in that cool, disinterested way only she can manage to do. There is appreciation lurking in her gaze, but Hannibal chooses to ignore this (he imagines he will be doing quite a deal of ignoring tonight). "Will," Bedelia adds after a moment. She comes to stand beside Lisa at their table, clutching her purse as though it were a shield between herself and the rest of the world.

They all sit down, and there is a tense silence for a moment before Will, surprisingly, asks, "Dr. Du Maurier, are you going to come back for dinner soon? Hannibal loves having you for dinner."

Hannibal shoots Will an unamused look, but the boy blithely ignores him, staring straight at Bedelia with wide, innocent eyes.

"That's very kind of you to ask, Will." Bedelia smiles at Will, red lips curving up at both ends. "I would love to join you both for dinner again." To Hannibal, she says, "Your artistry in the kitchen always leaves me wanting more."

Lisa and Will both frown at Bedelia's subtle flirtations, and Hannibal wants to roll his eyes at this entire situation. Instead, he says, "I appreciate having an audience. The presentation is as much a part of the meal as the food itself. Both are nourishing; one for the body, the other for the soul."

Bedelia nods her head. "We all enjoy feeding our bodies. Sometimes I think we forget the importance of feeding our souls as well." Her voice is quiet. Coy.

Hannibal just knows that Will is going to bring it up after their dinner is over. When they go home together, wrapped in their own thoughts (in each other's arms), when the alcohol has mellowed Hannibal's tongue enough to speak his thoughts, unbridled. He imagines the look

of jealousy in Will's eyes as the boy asks Hannibal whether he enjoys Bedelia's company more than his own. If he enjoys Bedelia's words more than the ones that fall from his own perfect lips. Hannibal will have to comfort his beloved, reassure him with words and mouth alike that no one can compare in any way to him, that nothing can compare to the joy Hannibal finds in his company and his alone.

It is with these thoughts (thoughts of Will, always of Will), that Hannibal responds, "I look forward to cooking for you again, Bedelia. You have a sophisticated palate. Such a thing is hard to come by these days."

What Bedelia might respond to such a statement, Hannibal will never know. There's a light clinking from the front of the banquet hall as the host of the gala taps on a (fake) crystal glass, clears her throat, and begins to make a speech. It's all white noise in Hannibal's ears as he stares at Will, eyes tracing the boy's profile as Will pretends to pay attention to the woman.

Will's ears are bright red, and Hannibal can smell his anger (his jealousy) like a cloud of smoke from some unseen fire. It burns Hannibal's nose, setting it aflame, and he wonders for a moment if his own face might become as red as Will's from the heat.

Hannibal leans down to Will's ear and whispers, "Are you alright, darling? I am sorry for ignoring you earlier. I only wished to keep the conversation away from you. I did promise that you would not have to speak tonight if you did not wish to."

Will ignores him, eyes staying firmly planted as the host blathers on and on about how every dollar counts in the fight against cancer.

Hannibal can handle many things. He can handle Will's anger. He can handle Will's sadness. His fear. His jealousy.

What Hannibal *cannot* handle is Will ignoring him. The lack of Will's attention, the lack of anything from the boy at all, spears through Hannibal's wildly beating heart. It takes all of his self-control not to pull the boy into his lap and *demand* Will look at him and *see* him as only Will can.

"I am going to the restroom," Hannibal says. "I would like for you to join me."

Will tilts his head. Hums. Then, "No, I don't think I need to go right now. I'll wait for you here."

Hannibal is incandescent. He grips Will's arm and tugs the boy up with all of his strength, cock twitching at the noise of quiet pain Will lets out from the rough treatment. Without a glance backward, Hannibal practically drags Will out of the banquet hall and down the hallway, not stopping until they are both locked inside the single-stall bathroom.

Will immediately tugs his arm from Hannibal's grip as soon as they are inside, glaring at Hannibal with all the delicious fury that Hannibal has wanted to see since Bedelia sat at their table (since Bedelia entered his life and took any of his time and attention away from Will).

“What are you *doing*,” Will hisses, cheeks crimson with his righteous anger. “I am trying so hard to be polite, to be the perfect son for you tonight. And you just have to go and ruin it by dragging me into the goddamn bathroom.”

“There’s no need for such uncouth language,” Hannibal remarks, leaning against the no-doubt filthy bathroom door as if he hasn’t a care in the world. With Will in front of him, seething and spewing poison from his succulent mouth, Hannibal truly doesn’t have a care. There is nowhere in the world he’d rather be than right here, right at this moment.

“No need—” Will doesn’t finish his sentence, merely turns to face the mirror. He grips the faucet with white knuckles, entire body trembling with the violence of his wrath.

Hannibal feels so blessed to be on the other end of it. He feels alive, a low hum of arousal thrumming through his body, a trickle of melted gold spilling down his spine. “You are doing a wonderful job,” Hannibal says. “Up until you disobeyed me. I asked you to come with me to the bathroom. You refused.”

Will’s scowl only deepens. He abruptly turns from the vanity to glare at Hannibal, entire face red including his plush, bitten lips. Hannibal imagines himself leaning down and biting into that delicate skin, breaking open the flesh until Will’s blood begins to pour into his mouth like a fountain of molasses, decadently sweet and utterly addictive.

“Whatever you’re thinking, stop,” Will says. “This is not the time.”

Hannibal tilts his head, catching his own reflection in the mirror. His hair is still expertly styled, his suit ironed to remove even a hint of a wrinkle, his tie expertly made into a trinity knot. His eyes, however, are completely wild. They burn like coals, maroon giving way to pure black as his pupils dilate further. Hannibal’s person suit is shredding at the seams, fabric tearing and falling, useless, to the bathroom floor. Hannibal does not even realize he’s moved until he suddenly finds himself pressing Will against the tile wall, shoving his nose into the boy’s throat, breathing in his scent.

“Hannibal,” Will whines, head tilted back to give Hannibal better access despite the reprimand in his tone. “People will know what you’re doing. They’ll see.”

“They see nothing,” Hannibal responds, licking at the pale column of Will’s neck. The boy’s pulse jumps and shivers beneath Hannibal’s tongue, a private exhibition only for Hannibal to see and feel. He continues to mouth at Will’s pulse, not sucking or biting, merely savoring the feel of Will’s skin beneath his tongue.

Will remains silent, the only sound in the room his stuttering breaths and the wet sounds of Hannibal licking at his neck.

Eventually, Hannibal forces himself to pull back, to give one last, lingering lap against Will’s throat before standing up straight. Hannibal reaches over and grabs a paper towel from the dispenser, dabbing at the wetness collected around his mouth, pressing the damp towel to Will’s neck next. Will is still, silent as Hannibal removes all traces of his slip in control. Hannibal crumples the used paper towel in his hand and throws it away, eyes never leaving Will’s.

“You were trying to make me jealous,” Will says, staring straight into Hannibal’s gaze. “Back there. With Bedelia. Why?”

Hannibal preens, proud of his boy, at how clever he is, at how strong. Resilient to a fault. Hannibal has seen Will break, and watching his beloved being built back up again (molded and shaped under Hannibal’s careful hands) is a high unlike anything Hannibal has ever experienced before. “Brilliant boy. Yes, I suppose I was…more friendly with Bedelia than was necessary in the moment. I enjoy seeing how you react to such things.”

“And when I didn’t react, you decided to drag me into the bathroom instead.”

Hannibal licks across the backs of his teeth, tongue tracing over gum and enamel, searching until he finds the words with which to respond. “How well you see me. I’ve never known myself as well as I know myself when I’m with you.”

Will shivers at that, his shoulder slumping as the anger and jealousy drains from his body. “Oh Hannibal, if you want my attention, you just have to ask. I would always rather be looking at you than anywhere else.”

Hannibal doesn’t have a response to that, heart stuck uncomfortably in his throat. All he can do is lean down and place a gentle, chaste kiss to Will’s lips, body aching with the need to pull Will closer (always closer) but knowing that there is no time now, not for the worship he wishes to bestow upon his boy.

“We should go back,” Hannibal admits, pulling away from Will as one would rip a suture from an open wound. “I will try and contain my manipulations, at least for the evening.”

Will snorts, a wry smile pulling up at the corners of his lips. “Yeah, I’m sure you’ll try your best.” There is no hope in his voice, only amusement.

Hannibal smiles back (though his smile is much more besotted) before turning and unlocking the bathroom door. He and Will walk side by side to the banquet hall, quietly slipping into their chairs just as the host finishes her long, utterly unnecessary speech.

“Are you looking forward to the dinner?” Lisa asks him as soon as his legs have hit the chair, a fresh layer of gloss applied to her bee-stung lips. “I heard they are catering from L’Ardente.”

Hannibal glances down at Will who is trying his absolute best to disappear into the seat of his chair, shoulders hunched forward, hands clasped firmly in his lap. It reminds Hannibal so much of how Will came to him, scared and desperate and alone. The thought does not sit well with Hannibal, and he reaches down his own hand to grab Will’s palm, squeezing it lightly in support as he turns to face Lisa once more.

“A wonderful choice. Their *prosciutto di parma* is always excellently done.”

Hannibal exchanges light conversation with Bedelia and Lisa as waiters in black and white tuxedos bring steaming plates to each of the tables. There is no ham, but the appetizer smells adequate enough, fried cauliflower with a light sauce of chili-garlic aioli.

Will wastes no time diving into his food, and Hannibal can only stare in equal parts wonder and horror as the boy devours his entire plate in a matter of minutes.

“Sorry,” Will whispers, wiping the last of the chili sauce with his napkin. Hannibal aches to lean down and clean the boy’s face himself, to lap at his supple lips until all traces of the spice are gone, replaced instead with the heady taste of Will himself. “I think I’m too nervous to eat slow tonight.”

“Think nothing of it, Mylimasis. I am simply content to be in your company. Regardless if you eat like a heathen.”

Will wrinkles his nose and sticks his tongue out at Hannibal, and it takes all of Hannibal’s sel-control not to bite the offending muscle until Will is writhing beneath him, bleeding from Hannibal’s teeth (from Hannibal’s love).

“I’m surprised you liked the appetizer, Will,” Lisa says, using her fork to create a haphazard pattern in her food rather than eating it. “I have a nephew about your age, and he refuses to eat anything other than hamburgers and pizza rolls.”

Hannibal mentally cringes at the words. If Will ever developed such a palate, Hannibal might have to remove the boy’s tongue altogether rather than let him suffer through such a horrific fate.

“I like all kinds of food,” Will says, scowling at his empty plate. “Hannibal’s spoiled me with good cooking.”

Hannibal sits up straighter in his chair, practically glowing at the praise. Bedelia glances at him from the corner of her eye, an inscrutable expression on her face.

The empty (or, in Lisa’s case, full) plates are swiftly removed and replaced with the next course, bowls of *minestra d’orzo*. This, too, is quickly devoured by Will. Hannibal savors each bite, noting with some consternation that the meat stock has not been left to simmer for long enough. Still, the soup is warm and fills the emptiness in his belly (the emptiness that demands to be filled with Will instead), and the next course is brought out not long after.

Lisa fiddles with her phone on and off throughout the dinner, an extremely rude behavior that normally would have Hannibal asking for her business card if he wasn’t so intimately involved in her life (Hannibal, unfortunately, cannot eat someone so closely related to his personal life, no matter how much he wishes to). Still, he cannot help the frown that slips onto his face as Lisa taps out text after text instead of eating the food provided for the attendees this evening. Even Will notices the behavior; he stares at Lisa’s phone as though he might cause it to spontaneously combust with just his eyes alone.

Adorable thing.

After dinner and dessert have both been served and the final plates cleared off of the tables, everyone is ushered into the ballroom for live music and dancing. Lisa sticks close to Hannibal’s side as they walk, and Hannibal is more than eager to shake the damned woman as soon as they reach the next room.

“Would you care to dance?” Hannibal asks Bedelia once they arrive. The floors of the ballroom glisten beneath the gaudy chandeliers, wood polished and buffed to a near blinding shine.

Bedelia glances at him beneath mascara-coated lashes and raises her hand to take Hannibal’s. Her hand is too big (too soft, not enough muscle or strength, nothing like Will’s perfect hands), but Hannibal holds it anyway, nothing but the image of a perfect gentleman as he guides her into a waltz.

Will watches them dance from the sidelines, a glass of lemon water clenched in his fist. He tracks their movements with unnervingly empty eyes, his slight frame lost in the crowd as Hannibal leads Bedelia to the other side of the room.

“Are you enjoying your evening?” Bedelia asks. Her perfume is nearly cloying from this distance, the scent of citrus and patchouli overwhelming as Hannibal attempts to breathe in short, shallow breaths.

“I am. It is the first fundraiser I have attended in some time.”

“I imagine that changing careers and adopting a child is quite taxing on one’s social calendar.”

“You imagine correctly.”

Hannibal twirls Bedelia, and her light laughter floats above the ballroom like a stray piece of ash being lifted above a smoldering flame. When he brings her back close, her grip tightens, the hand placed on his shoulder holding him tightly as they continue their dance.

By the time Hannibal escorts Bedelia back to the crowds mingling along the edges of the room, Will is nowhere to be found. Hannibal frowns and accepts Lisa’s offer of a dance, content to use her as a tool to further scan the room. He maneuvers them from one side of the lengthy ballroom to the other, but Will remains elusive, his shock of chocolate curls still hidden even as Hannibal uses his excellent vision to pare the crowd, slicing through clumps of people as one would slice ligament from muscle.

Hannibal is asked to dance by another socialite, then another acquaintance, this one a doctor from Johns Hopkins. Dozens of others ask for his company, and it seems hours have passed before Hannibal is finally allowed to rest, a glance of champagne finding its way into his hand as he again searches for his boy.

With his glass in hand like a guiding lantern, Hannibal expertly weaves in and out of groups of people scattered around the room, a pleasant smile on his face even as his stomach plummets as, with each group passed, Will is still mysteriously absent.

It is with great relief that Hannibal finally finds his beloved. Will is standing in a hallway outside the ballroom, looking off into the distance, though at what Hannibal cannot tell.

“Darling,” Hannibal says, startling the boy.

Will's head snaps around to look at Hannibal, eyes wide, chest heaving with each and every one of his racing breaths.

"Will, is everything alright?"

Will looks back down the hall, and in the distance, Hannibal can hear…sirens? Police sirens, loud and wailing as they grow closer and closer.

"Will."

Will turns once more to face Hannibal in the darkened hall. There's melted snow on his shoes, a hint of moisture in his curls. His cheeks are flushed red, as is the tip of his upturned nose, the cherry color a stark contrast to the rest of his pale skin.

"What have you done?" Hannibal asks. His voice is so low, so quiet, Hannibal is surprised Will can hear it all.

Will's own voice is light and breathy as he responds, "Happy birthday."

Three Hours Earlier

Will is not stupid. He may be young, he may be inexperienced, he may have no idea what he is doing most of the time, but he is not stupid. He is, in fact, rather smart. And even if he weren't as intelligent as he is, it wouldn't take a genius to see that Hannibal is purposely winding him up, playing him against Bedelia and Lisa as if he is a pawn, a puppet for Hannibal to maneuver on strings made of sharpened steel, knives digging into his back like antlers as Hannibal guides his emotions into a dance of anger and jealousy.

He ignores Hannibal, content to treat the man's childish behavior as simply that: childish. Hannibal is playing a dangerous game by trying to prey on Will's emotions in such a blatant way. Will can feel Bedelia and Lisa's jealousy every time Hannibal turns his fleeting attention from one of them to the other, and Will's own jealousy rises up like a tide, Hannibal's straying eyes the full moon tugging on his chest and pulling the emotion from his unwilling heart.

And then Hannibal has the *nerve* to grab Will's arm and haul him into the bathroom, locking the door behind them.

Will cannot help himself from saying, "What are you *doing*? I am trying so hard to be polite, to be the perfect son for you tonight. And you just have to go and ruin it by dragging me into the goddamn bathroom."

Will is afraid, now. Not of Hannibal (never of Hannibal), but of what Hannibal will find if he decides to divest Will of his current clothing. Hannibal has that look in his eyes, the one that screams of *lust* and *hunger* and the need to *devour*. But Hannibal cannot know about what Will has hidden in his pocket. The scalpel. The alcohol wipes. The mementos of weeks and weeks of planning, all leading to this night.

So Will discourages Hannibal the best he can, saddened to push the man and his affections, his love, away. Will has been touch-starved for so long; it physically hurts to reject Hannibal's touches now that he has them within his reach.

His neck tingles and burns where Hannibal's tongue laves it with attention. It's all Will can do not to drop to his knees and beg to take Hannibal into his mouth (where the man belongs), to taste the heady proof of the older man's desire, one addictive drop at a time.

But Will's distance is for the best. Will is doing all of this for Hannibal after all, and Hannibal will not be the one to ruin it.

They eventually leave the bathroom and sit back at their table, the lights in the room low as course after course of delicious food is brought straight to their laps. With each dish, Will imagines just how much food is going to waste tonight. He eyes Lisa's full plates and bowls with open disgust as she barely eats more than a single bite from each course brought out. Six months ago, Will would have killed to even lick the remnants of the scraps from her plate. It's despicable, the level of apathy needed to waste so much perfectly good food (though not as good as Hannibal's, nothing is ever as good as Hannibal's cooking) without a care.

Luckily, Lisa will not be wasting expensive food for much longer.

The last of their dessert plates are carried away, and Will feels butterflies explode in his stomach as his plan is finally set into motion. This is it; weeks of planning, thinking, searching, concealing. All of it so that Hannibal knows, once and for all, who truly owns him.

And that person is Will.

Everyone rises from their seats to walk into the ballroom. In the shuffle, Will slips his hand into Lisa's purse and snatches her cellphone from the main compartment. Will hasn't pickpocketed in a while (certainly not since moving in with Hannibal), but the muscle memory is still there, and Lisa is none the wiser as she tottles on too-high heels beside Hannibal, desperate for even a sliver of his attention.

Will peels away from the crowd, ducking into the very same bathroom where Hannibal had cornered him before. Will hadn't been sure when planning his evening where he would make this call, but Hannibal's little stunt earlier had provided Will with the perfect place to enact the next step in his plan.

Will types in Lisa's password, easily memorized from the amount of times she used her phone throughout dinner (and Will could laugh at the blatantly upset expression on Hannibal's face when he saw Lisa using her phone during dinner rather than conversing; Will doesn't know much about etiquette, but he knows that if Hannibal is upset enough to have it show on his face, Lisa must have committed some serious faux pas this evening).

Will pulls up the phone app, fingers poised over the black and white numbers appearing on the screen.

This is it. The last moment to stop before everything is put into motion. He can still go back, slip Lisa's phone into her purse, and no one would be any the wiser. He could watch

Hannibal dance with Bedelia, listen to her laugh and flirt as Hannibal keeps her company throughout the evening. He could watch Hannibal leave day after day, week after week, to spend time with the horrible woman, each minute spent in her company one less minute spent with Will. He could watch Hannibal realize that Bedelia is so much better suited for him, so much more elegant and beautiful and proper.

He could lose Hannibal, the only person he has ever loved.

No. Will is not going to risk such a thing. He is going to make the call. And he's going to finish this night exactly according to plan.

With trembling hands, Will types in the number he memorized after hours spent shuffling through the unnaturally organized files in Hannibal's home office. In the end, it had been almost too easy to find what Will was looking for: a manila folder labeled *Jason Larue* in Hannibal's elegant, flowing script. Inside, there was a copy of the police report detailing Jason's death, as well as an account of Hannibal's role in the events of that day.

Will's encephalitis had reached its peak the day Hannibal killed Jason. Will wishes he could turn back time, could see Hannibal raise a gun and effortlessly end the man's life without a second thought. What Will wouldn't *give* to see Hannibal kill someone like that, covered in blood, the man full of apathy where there should be empathy.

Will realizes he's grown hard in the tailored pants of his suit, and he breathes in and out deeply in order to calm himself.

He presses the call button.

The phone rings once. Twice. Three times.

None of his plan will work if the man doesn't pick up.

Finally, "Hello? Who is this?" The voice is gruff, filled with nicotine and perhaps a few shots of whiskey.

Will's heart leaps, a feeling of relief (of pure adrenaline) racing through his body. "Hello. This is Lisa Carter. Dr. Du Maurier's assistant. Is this Noah?"

"Yes. Why the hell are you calling me? How did you get my number?"

Will clears his throat, the muscles in his esophagus already aching from mimicking Lisa's voice. His empathy certainly has its quirks, and for some reason, Will has always been able to imitate others' voices with far more accuracy than most.

It is certainly a helpful side effect in committing crime.

"I am making this call as a courtesy to you. Dr. Du Maurier is currently located at the Four Seasons Hotel on Pennsylvania Avenue. I can guarantee she will be in the alleyway north of the hotel at ten o'clock this evening. If you want to avenge your brother's death, now is your time."

A pause. Nothing but static caressing the inside of Will's ear. Then, "Why are you doing this?"

Will clears her (his) throat once more, pouting into the phone as if she (he) is truly Lisa, as if she (he) is truly questioning why a man as insignificant as Noah is questioning her (his) motives. "I'm doing this for the both of us. You need revenge. I need Bedelia out of my life. No questions asked."

From what Will gathered from Bedelia and Hannibal's conversations, Noah was a reckless man, uncaring if he was seen or heard while stalking Dr. Du Maurier. His brother was no less bold, showing up at Bedelia's office before ending up with a bullet in his body for his troubles. Will is counting on that recklessness now.

He just needs Noah to take the bait.

"No questions, huh?" There's the sound of scratching, perhaps Noah rubbing at the stubble on his chin. "She must be some boss."

"She was the cause of your brother's murder. Her leadership skills aren't much better."

A choked laugh. "I suppose you're right." One last pause. "I'll be there. Ten o'clock."

Will can't help the relieved breath he lets out into the phone's microphone. The phone is gripped so tightly in his palm he's worried he'll break the plastic case surrounding the device. "Good luck," Will offers.

Noah hangs up, and Will pulls the phone away from his ear, allowing himself a moment to breathe, to steady himself before he pulls out one of the alcohol wipes from his inner pocket. A few quick swipes and the phone is clean, devoid of any of Will's fingerprints. He flushes the used wipe down the toilet and uses the cuff of his jacket to place the phone in his pocket, careful not to leave any new prints.

Will walks quickly and quietly down the hall, ducking his head to avoid eye contact as he passes a few stragglers from the gala. Inside the ballroom, a small orchestra is warming up, instruments making a discordant cacophony of sound that mellows out into a single, matching note.

Will spots Lisa—still standing far too close to Hannibal for Will's liking—and walks over to her side, using the sleeve of his shirt to drop the phone back into her purse.

His throat hurts from speaking in such a high-pitched tone for so long, and Will grabs a glass of lemon water from a nearby waiter, downing half the glass in a single swallow.

Hannibal leads Bedelia onto the floor, and Will can only watch with hatred as the elegant woman is spun around, her form-fitting gown doing nothing to hide the curves of her ample bosom. Her dress is navy, covered in a gold brocade, and the golden fabric glistens beneath the chandeliers as Hannibal leads her around the room.

Everyone is watching them; how can they not? Even Will is powerless to tear his eyes away from the stunning couple, Hannibal's tall, broad form and dark hair a perfect compliment to Bedelia's blonde curls and slim frame.

Jealousy eats away at Will's insides, so potent and toxic he can barely breathe. It's a relief when Hannibal finally leads Bedelia back to near where Will is standing, though the relief is short-lived. Hannibal takes Lisa's hand next, and Will watches once more as his love is led away from him, another woman on his arm (another woman in his eyes).

Will takes the opportunity for what it is.

He places his empty water glass on a nearby tray and walks over to where Bedelia is also watching Hannibal, a small frown on her red lips.

"Bedelia," he whispers, allowing a small quiver to slip into his voice. The fear is not faked, the tremble in his words unforced.

"Will," she says, turning to face him. Her frown deepens when she sees how nervous Will looks. "Is everything alright?"

This is the most important part of the plan. If he can't get Bedelia outside, if he can't lure her away from the crowd, then all of this will have been for nothing.

Luckily, Will is an excellent fisherman.

"Can I talk to you in private?" Will asks, tilting his head so his curls fall across his forehead. He draws his shoulders in, tucks his chin into his neck. He forces himself to look as small and broken as he did when he first met Hannibal all those months ago. "It's about Hannibal."

Bedelia's eyes flash with intrigue. Even without Will's empathy he would be able to see the fascination in Bedelia's face as she takes a step closer to Will. "Hannibal? What about Hannibal?"

Will bites down on his bottom lip, refusing to look over at where Hannibal is dancing with another person, this time a man in a suit nearly as expensive as Hannibal's own.

"I can't tell you here," Will says. He keeps his voice quiet, forcing Bedelia to take another step closer so that their feet are almost touching. "It's…it's a secret."

Bedelia nods, picking up on the urgency, the desperation in Will's voice. "Very well. Do you have a place in mind?"

Will nods toward the hall. "There's a door down that way that leads outside. I want to go out for our conversation. I don't…I don't want Hannibal accidentally finding us while I'm talking to you." Will allows all his fear and nervousness for this evening to come fully to the front of his face, and Bedelia staggers back at the look of raw panic in Will's eyes.

"Lead the way," she says.

Will turns, unable to help the smile that slips onto his face as he weaves in and out of people and into the empty hall. They walk in silence to the last door in the dark hallway, a glass exit that leads to the alley at the north of the hotel. Will pushes open the door, then steps aside for Bedelia to follow.

It's chilly out, snow swirling in small eddies around their feet as the winter air steals the breath from their lungs.

"I'll be quick," Will promises, eyeing the watch on Bedelia's wrist.

It reads 9:47. He has thirteen minutes to stall.

"There's no need for that," Bedelia murmurs. "Take your time. It seems you wish to discuss something important."

Will nods, heart aching at what he's about to do. Though this is all for Hannibal in the end, it still pains him that Bedelia will have a slandered view of Hannibal before she dies, an inaccurate image of the man Will loves so much.

Still, sacrifices must be made if Will is to have what he wants. And Hannibal is always encouraging Will to take what he wishes without thought.

Will is simply following Hannibal's instructions.

With trembling hands (more from the cold than any fear), Will takes off his suit jacket. He rolls up the sleeves on his button-down, revealing to Bedelia the ring of bruises around each of his wrists, marks left from Hannibal taking Will against the kitchen counter last night after a particularly delicious meal.

Bedelia gasps as the marks are revealed. With only the flickering light of a nearby lamppost to illuminate his arms, the bruises look so much worse, dark and purple and angry against his pale skin. Will's heart skips a beat at revealing such an intimate thing to someone else, even if for just a moment.

"Are those from Hannibal?" Bedelia asks, a hand pressed over her mouth. Her eyes are wide open, shocked, though not as much as Will had expected. He stares into her gaze for a moment, reading her emotions as easily as though they were written on a large sign and then lit up with neon lettering.

"You suspected him of something," Will says, watching with satisfaction as Bedelia tries to force her mask back into place. It's too late; Will has already seen all he needs to see. "You thought Hannibal was hiding something. You just didn't think it was this."

Bedelia shakes her head, though whether she's refuting Will's claims or merely revolted by the marks on Will's arm, he cannot say. "I…thought there may be some darkness lurking beneath the surface. But no, I did not suspect him capable of physically harming you. He looks at you with such love."

“Love is a violent thing,” Will replies. He quickly rolls down the sleeves of his shirt and picks his suit jacket up off the cold, snowy cement. “I didn’t know who else to tell. He doesn’t let me talk to people much. He’s so controlling.”

Bedelia nods along with each sentence, putting together pieces in her mind that don’t fit but that seem as though they might match. With only a few pieces of the puzzle, the image Bedelia creates in her mind is false but believable.

“Will you help me?” Will asks. He looks up at her, snowflakes caught in his eyelashes and partially obscuring his vision. “I need your help.”

“Of course, Will.” Bedelia’s face is as pale as the snow on the ground, her once-perfect curls now limp and flat from the precipitation. “I am so sorry you have had to experience such abuse. Your words are safe with me. I’ll help you.”

“I’m so glad to hear you say that,” Will says. He takes a step toward the door, then pauses. He makes sure there are an ample amount of tears in his eyes as he asks Bedelia, “Could you wait here for just a second? I…I need to go grab some tissues. Don’t make me go back to Hannibal. Not yet.”

“No, Will. You never have to see that man again.” Bedelia’s voice is serious. Low. Will would be touched at her loyalty if he wasn’t keeping a deranged giggle buried deep in his chest.

“I’ll be right back,” he promises. “And Bedelia…thank you. So much.”

Bedelia melts. “No, Will. Thank you for sharing with me. I cannot imagine how much courage it took to divulge such a thing.”

The lure is swallowed, completely buried in her belly. Bedelia thanks him as Will slides the hook into the side of her mouth, and he can only watch with glee as his catch is about to be reeled in. And oh, what a catch this will be.

Hannibal will be so proud.

Will nods once at Bedelia before slipping back inside the building. The glass on the doorway is dark, tinted so that those on the outside cannot see inside. Bedelia has no idea that Will is standing, staring, only a few feet from where she waits in the cold.

She doesn’t have to wait long.

In the distance, a hooded figure makes its way down the alley. Bedelia glances at the door, then back at the approaching man. The man doesn’t come too close; he remains on the other end of the alley from Bedelia, the light from the flickering lamp post not enough to illuminate his face which is hidden beneath the hood of his jacket.

There’s a glint, a flash of metal, and then a loud *pop* that echoes in Will’s ears long after the sound has dissipated, the echo of it curling into the air like the smoke from the end of the man’s gun.

Bedelia's body jerks backward, a shock of bright red blood bursting from her chest as she crumples to the ground. The streaks of crimson spread around her like ribbons, wrapping her bare arms and ankles in thick, steaming liquid. The snow melts beneath the onslaught of hot blood, and even through the door, Will swears he can smell the salty, coppery tang.

It's now or never.

Without a glance backward, Will pushes open the hotel door and comes to stand next to Bedelia's prone form. Her eyes are glazed over with shock, the pain of the bullet wound not quite setting in. Her breaths are slow, sluggish, each exhale wet and shaky.

Will doesn't have much time.

With a trembling hand from excitement, Will takes the scalpel out of his jacket pocket and crouches over Bedelia, making sure her eyes are focused on him, on the shining blade in his hand (on the hatred burning in his eyes).

"What…" she coughs, blood spitting out of her mouth and across her navy dress. "How…"

Will grins, all teeth, and slowly lowers the blade into her heart. He knows exactly where to stab, exactly what arteries and ventricles lie beneath the slow rise and fall of Bedelia's rib cage. The blade sinks in effortlessly, flesh and muscle parting beneath its wickedly sharp tip.

"Hannibal is *mine*," Will hisses, the bottom of his hand now almost level with Bedelia's breast. His scalpel has sunk all the way into her heart, nearly reaching through to the back of her ribs. Will abruptly pulls the blade out with a wet *schluck*, careful not to get any blood on his sleeve. There is enough blood pouring from the stab wound that Will could almost slip in it, drench himself in it, roll around in the warm, thick liquid and wait for Hannibal to lick it off his body, a rebirth in blood.

Bedelia can barely keep her icy blue eyes open, but she manages one last look of betrayal (a look that causes Will's cock to harden in his trousers, one he will picture again and again for the rest of his life) before she closes her eyes and doesn't move again.

It's done.

Will has done it.

And Will doesn't think he's ever felt so proud of himself before. Not kissing Hannibal for the first time, or hearing Hannibal say *I love you*, or even killing Linda in their basement had given him such a rush of pure adrenaline. He feels like his teeth are too large for his mouth, like his skin is too snug around his bones, like every inch of muscle and sinew in his body might split and peel away to reveal the beast lying within. It feels like there are antlers growing from his head, spines emerging from his back.

Will licks his lips and reaches into his pocket for his second alcohol wipe, quickly cleaning the scalpel and putting it back in his suit for later disposal. There is only one step left in his plan. He just needs to go back to the bathroom; the scalpel is small enough that flushing it down the toilet will (probably) not clog it.

And after that…Will can only imagine how Hannibal will react when he learns what Will has done (what Will has provided for Hannibal, only for Hannibal).

Will casts one last look at Bedelia, soaking in the sight of her blood-stained curls, the stab wound in her chest, the elegant arch of her neck as it rests against the crimson snow.

With a sigh, Will opens the door and goes back inside. He wipes down the door handle on both sides with the last of his alcohol wipes, then heads toward the bathroom.

In the distance, Will hears the wailing of sirens.

He tilts his head and looks back at the glass door, surprised. Someone must have heard the gunshot and called the police. He hopes that whoever heard the gunshot didn't see anything. The light from the lamppost was negligible, and besides an eyewitness, Will has been so utterly diligent up until this point to cover his tracks. There's no way they will find him.

Right?

"Darling," a voice says, and Will nearly jumps out of his skin. He turns around to find Hannibal at the end of the hall, an unreadable expression in his eyes.

Will doesn't respond. It feels as though his tongue is glued to the roof of his mouth. His heart is pounding so hard in his chest (from fear, from exhaustion, from the pure, unrestrained triumph that comes from a successful hunt).

"Will," Hannibal says, taking a step closer. "Is everything alright?"

Will looks away from Hannibal once more, noting with dismay that the sirens are only growing louder. He wishes he could have cut out Bedelia's heart and handed it to Hannibal on a silver platter. He wishes he could have stabbed out her eyes for looking at Hannibal, chopped off her hands for touching Hannibal, destroyed her brain for *thinking about Hannibal*.

"Will."

Will forces himself to turn and face his love, the only thing in this fucking world that matters.

"What have you done?" Hannibal asks.

Oh god, Hannibal does not sound happy. Why is he not happy? Doesn't he know that Will has done this all for him? That Will loves him more than anyone else can possibly love another human being? Doesn't he see that Will has destroyed the one thing standing in their way, and now there is room for only them from now until eternity?

Will cannot express these sentiments, can only allow them to roll around in his mind like glass marbles, each thought clinking against the next, the glass threatening to break and send scattered shards around his brain with each impact.

The only thing Will can truly think to say is, "Happy birthday."

Hannibal tilts his head, and Will pushes past him and runs into the bathroom. He locks the door behind him, ignoring Hannibal's fist pounding on the thick wood.

"Will," Hannibal calls, voice eerily calm. "Will, open this door."

"Just a second," Will hisses, shoving the used wipes and scalpel into the toilet before flushing them down. Will breathes a sigh of relief when they disappear into depths of the tubes beneath the porcelain bowl. Quickly, Will washes his hands, scrubbing them until they are pink and raw before drying them and opening the bathroom door.

Hannibal stands on the other side, hand raised in midair. It would be a comical sight if Hannibal didn't look so upset.

"Darling," he grits out. "I don't appreciate being ignored."

"We should go back to the ballroom," Will says. "Now."

Hannibal clenches his jaw. Will worries the man might split open a tooth with the ferocity of his bite.

"Very well. And then you are going to explain to me why, exactly, there is snow in your hair and the sound of sirens in the distance."

Will ruffles his curls, feeling the moisture still lingering in the strands. "Why do you assume the sirens have anything to do with me?" Will forces his shoulders to relax, his hands to unclench from the fists he had made at his sides. He widens his eyes and gives Hannibal his best, innocent expression.

The man is not fooled for an instant. Will wouldn't love Hannibal if he was.

"Call it an instinct," Hannibal says, grabbing Will's hand and pulling him out of the hallway and back into the ballroom. The orchestra is still playing music, though most of the couples are either finished dancing for the evening or swaying slightly to the soft song, slowly tipping from side to side as the alcohol and exhaustion set in from a long night out.

Lisa walks over to them as soon as they enter, a strange expression on her face. "Have you seen Bedelia?" she asks Hannibal, completely ignoring Will. "I haven't seen her in over an hour, and she and I rode here together. I was hoping to leave soon." She glances at Hannibal from beneath thick, painted lashes. "That is, unless you want me to stay?"

Hannibal rolls his shoulders and forces on a polite smile. Will wants to laugh at how pained Hannibal looks, his person suit barely containing his beast as he keeps a firm grip on Will's hand. "While I have enjoyed your presence this evening, there is no need for you to prolong your stay for me. Will and I were just about to go home as well."

Lisa frowns and shrugs, one hand clutching the strap of her purse, the other resting on her hip. "That's fine. I suppose I'll see you on Monday, then."

"Monday," Hannibal agrees, attention already wandering.

Lisa walks away, purse still held tightly in her hand, and Hannibal stares down at Will with blazing maroon eyes.

“I believe you owe me an explanation,” Hannibal says, voice soft. Deadly.

Will shivers, cock once again thickening in his trousers. Hannibal’s nostrils flare, and that only helps rather than hinders Will’s arousal. Hannibal drags Will to the very edge of the room, to a quiet corner where there is no one but them (as it should be).

“Well?” Hannibal asks. His eyes are black in the muted light. There’s a light sheen of sweat on his forehead, no doubt from all the dancing he has engaged in this evening. It makes Will want to stand up on his toes and lick every inch of the salty skin until there is no evidence left of Hannibal spending time with anyone other than Will.

“Well what?” Will asks, petulant.

“Where did you go?” Hannibal asks. “And why did you tell me happy birthday?”

“Because it’s your birthday,” Will responds. “And I went outside for a moment. That’s why there was snow in my hair.”

“But *why*,” Hannibal growls, and oh god Will is so hard it hurts. Hannibal looks like a demon, like something conjured up from the very pits of hell to come and torment Will with his sharp cheekbones and sharp teeth and even sharper tongue.

Will whines, rolling his hips against empty air, and forces himself to focus. “You’ll see,” is all Will manages to say.

Hannibal opens his mouth, but his response is stopped by the loud thundering of footsteps. Dozens of them. Men and women in blue uniforms flood past the ballroom and run down the hall where Will and Hannibal were standing only moments ago.

Hannibal traces their movements with wide eyes, and Will keeps his face perfectly neutral. Everyone else in the ballroom is watching, too. The orchestra stops playing. Soon the only sound is the whispered murmurs of hundreds of guests, the pounding of boots against the floor, and Will’s heart rushing in his ears.

The host of the gala walks over to the flood of officers and asks one of them a question. Will’s ears cannot make out their conversation, but perhaps Hannibal’s can. Whatever he hears, it causes him to go slightly pale before looking down at Will once more, his mask firmly in place. Will wishes he could read Hannibal, wishes he could know what the man is thinking.

He supposes he’ll find out soon enough.

Before the host can turn to the crowd and explain away the presence of the police, a large man with dark skin and a miserable expression on his round face pushes his way to the front of the room.

“My name is Jack Crawford,” he barks out, voice easily filling the large space and quieting all remaining conversation. “I’m with the FBI. And no one here is leaving until I’ve asked some questions.”

Will glances up at Hannibal beneath his eyelashes, a mimicry of Lisa, though this time his look is sheepish rather than flirtatious.

“Happy birthday?” he repeats.

Hannibal sighs.

Fallout

Chapter Summary

Hannibal and Will deal with the repercussions of Will's gift to Hannibal.

Jack Crawford is every law enforcement stereotype wrapped into one large, hulking frame. He barks his orders with a kind of confidence most agents can only dream of achieving, moves through crowds like the prophet Moses parting the Red Sea, and has an air of unnerving self-righteousness that resonates from each and every one of his pores like a cloying fever. Despite the man's age—Hannibal estimates him to be in his mid-thirties at most—there is no lack of respect from his subordinate officers. Each one follows Jack's harsh commands, no matter how small or menial they may be.

"What's going on?" Lisa asks next to Hannibal, a deep frown drawn over her face. "Why is the FBI here? And why do they need to talk to us?"

Hannibal wants to roll his eyes at the inane line of questions. The woman asks as if Hannibal has any more information than she does, despite both of them being guests of the same gala. Though, as Hannibal looks down at the expression on Will's face (pride and guilt mixed together to produce a rather adorable brand of sheepishness), Hannibal supposes he might know slightly more than any other attendee in the room about why there are a slew of officers walking down the hall and creeping into the ballroom like a row of black-shelled beetles, each of their hands itching toward their holsters as if the devil himself might pop out of the opulent walls and begin slaughtering guests and officers alike.

"Have you found Bedelia?" Hannibal asks, heart leaping into his throat at the feral look in Will's eyes at the mention of the woman's name.

"No," Lisa pouts. "Not yet. I hope she's close by. The last thing I need is for my ride to be taken away for questioning."

Hannibal thinks, for a brief moment, that Lisa not having a ride home for the evening should be the least of the girl's worries.

He keeps this thought to himself.

Will slips his hand into Hannibal's, the picture of a scared child, and Hannibal tightens his palm against Will's own, reveling in the feel of Will's warm, soft skin beneath his.

"Everything will be alright, darling," Hannibal murmurs. "I am sure there is nothing to be worried about."

Hannibal's voice is laced with placation. He is confident that only Will can pick up on the underlying thread of inquisitiveness in his tone.

"I'm sure you're right," Will says. "Nothing to be worried about."

Hannibal lets out a sigh of relief (if Will is not worried, then Hannibal trusts the boy enough to not be concerned as well) and allows his shoulders to lower from where they had gathered, tense, for a brief moment. "Excellent. Shall we ask the hostess if she has any idea as to why we are being detained?"

Will tilts his head to the side, his lovely face the picture of innocence. "If you want."

"Wait, I need you to help me find Bedelia," Lisa says. "Please."

Again, Hannibal forces his eyes to remain steady rather than rolling them with annoyance as he so desperately desires to do. "I am sure we will find her soon."

Jack Crawford comes barreling toward their small trio, the black leather of his jacket doing little to conceal his imposing body. Perhaps that is the idea. Hannibal suspects much of Jack Crawford's appearance—from the shine on his leather shoes to the short, cropped length of his hair—is meticulously cultivated in order to make up for his age (or lack thereof). Hierarchy is everything in law enforcement, after all. Without the respect of his inferior officers, Jack Crawford has nothing except his own wits, and Hannibal has yet to see any indication of those.

"Are you Lisa Clark?" Jack asks, clipped and succinct. Not a man to mince words, then.

"Yes," Lisa says, face flushing red when everyone in the vicinity immediately begins to stare. The ballroom is still hushed, the only thing breaking the silence being Jack's booming voice and the quiet whispers of a hundred frozen guests. "Is something the matter?"

Jack clears his throat and jerks his head to the side. "I would like to ask you some questions, if you wouldn't mind." Jack's voice makes it clear he would mind very much if Lisa refused.

"Oh…okay." Lisa glances at Hannibal, eyes wide and panicked, and Hannibal gazes back at her, serene.

Jack herds Lisa into a corner of the ballroom and begins asking her questions with small, subtle movements of his arms as if his entire body is involved in the questioning and not just his mouth. The whispers of the surrounding guests only grow louder and louder in volume until the silence breaks and everyone begins talking at once.

Hannibal looks down at Will, at the way their hands are still clenched tightly together. The boy's hair has finally dried, not a trace of snow or moisture left in his mussed curls. Hannibal aches to run his hands through the silky strands, to scrape his fingernails into Will's scalp until the boy melts into a puddle at his feet, but now is not the time.

It is, however, the perfect time to ask Will some questions of his own. Hannibal hopes he will be the only one questioning Will tonight.

“Will Bedelia be joining us later this evening?” Hannibal asks. The question is innocuous enough, and to prying ears there would be nothing remiss in asking such a thing. Will, however, recoils away from the question as if stung.

“No,” he eventually says. “No, I don’t think she will be.”

Hannibal nods, a rising excitement bubbling up in his veins. If Will has gone and done what Hannibal suspects…Hannibal isn’t sure whether to be upset or elated. He ends up with a swirling mixture of both, along with a healthy dash of pride. How can Hannibal truly be upset at his darling Will for becoming the one thing that Hannibal has always wanted and ached for his entire life: an equal.

“I see,” Hannibal says. “Well, let us hope we are not detained for long. I am…eager to return home.”

Will raises an eyebrow but doesn’t respond, his fingers tightening the slightest amount over Hannibal’s own.

Frederick Chilton comes sidling over to them not long after Lisa has been commandeered by Jack. The man is holding a full glass of clear, bubbling champagne, and from the way his torso sways as he walks, it is hardly his first of the evening.

“There’s a rumor going around that they’ve found a body,” Chilton says, his cheeks flushed with alcohol and excitement. He spares a fleeting glance at Will, as if unsure how much he can say in front of the boy (as if Will isn’t the one who put the body there in the first place) before continuing, “I still don’t understand why the FBI has to be involved, though. Everyone knows D.C. has one of the highest crime rates in the country. I’m sure countless bodies have dropped on this very street. Surely this is a matter for the local police department.”

Hannibal rolls his shoulders, stitches his mask tighter over his face in order to hide his annoyance at having to spend any time or thought on the man in front of him. Will, his clever boy, is not fooled for an instant by Hannibal’s pleasant expression. Will looks like he’s barely concealing his own annoyance, though there is some amusement in his eyes as he stares up at Hannibal.

“Perhaps it is an issue of jurisdiction,” Hannibal responds smoothly. “I have never truly understood the intricacies of the American legal system.” A lie; Hannibal knows more than most lawyers about what is and isn’t legal at any particular location. It is, after all, extremely hard to avoid falling prey to the law if one knows only a little about it. And Hannibal is not, nor has ever been, prey to anything or anyone. “Or perhaps it has to do with the particular attendants of tonight’s gala.”

Chilton shifts, staring around the room with unbridled hunger. There are CEOs, senators, surgeons. People with far more money than brain cells. Will was certainly…bold in his choice of location for Hannibal’s birthday gift (and once Hannibal knows for certain that the present is, in fact, Bedelia’s corpse, he will have to thoroughly thank Will for giving Hannibal the most thoughtful, exquisite gift he has ever received).

“Perhaps,” Chilton says. He sniffs, takes a large enough swallow of champagne that Hannibal cannot hide his wince, and then continues running his mouth about things he really shouldn’t be speaking of.

It is almost an hour later before Jack gruffly announces that they are all allowed to leave. Lisa is nowhere to be seen, having long been carted off by another group of officers only a few minutes after Jack took hold of her, presumably for more questioning.

Will looks tired, the darling thing drooping against Hannibal with all the grace of a fallen angel. His curls are mussed, his blue eyes dark with exhaustion, his pale skin nearly translucent beneath the flickering chandeliers. There are smudges of purple beneath each of his weary eyes, and Hannibal aches to hold Will in his arms, to carry his darling home and then never let go. Will’s pride, however, forbids Hannibal from doing anything more than placing his broad palm against Will’s tiny waist as they walk, side by side, to the valet.

By the time they do return home, Will is slumped against the passenger window, breath fogging the cool glass as he breathes deeply through his open mouth. A tiny drop of saliva sits at the corner of his chapped lips, and Hannibal cannot help himself from leaning over and lapping up the escaped liquid, savoring the taste of Will on his tongue (a far better taste than even the dinner they were served that night).

Hannibal does allow himself to carry Will out of the car and up the stairs, ignoring the boy’s muted protests. Hannibal is far from tired himself, practically quivering with the desire to question Will on just what, exactly, his present to Hannibal had entailed, but Hannibal keeps his questions to himself as he undresses Will.

The first thing to go is Will’s rumpled suit jacket, the silk fabric showing wear after a long evening out. Next is Will’s leather belt, then the pants of his suit. As Hannibal is unbuttoning the boy’s shirt, he smells the sharp scent of copper, salty and pungent, rolling off from the cuff of Will’s white sleeves. There is no visible trace of any blood, no hidden drops of crimson, but the scent remains nonetheless. Masking the smell of copper is the burning scent of rubbing alcohol and the cool steel of a tightly-held scalpel.

“Darling,” Hannibal coos, removing Will’s shirt until the boy is wearing nothing but a pair of lacy black shorts. “Tell me about your evening. I am remiss to say you were out of my sight for quite some time. What occupied your attention while you were away?”

There’s a flash in Will’s eyes, something proud and bold (something utterly *delectable*) and Will slides from the bed so that he’s standing in front of Hannibal while Hannibal remains kneeling at the boy’s feet. Hannibal feels like a supplicant at the altar of his chosen deity, and he knows deep in his bones (in his soul, if he has one) that this is where he belongs; on his knees for Will. There is no other place for him, no other stance or posture that adequately defines his being. He is Will’s, and Will is his.

And they twain shall be one flesh: so then they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.

Will rolls his shoulders back (and Hannibal’s heart throbs at the blatant sign of his influence over the boy) and casts his eyes down over Hannibal, gaze roving first over Hannibal’s face,

then his covered torso, before finally making its way to his bent knees.

“I gave you a reminder,” Will growls. His thick lashes cast a shadow over his eyes, turning the blue to a near midnight black.

Hannibal shivers. “A reminder of what, Mylimasis?”

“A reminder of who *owns* you,” Will says. He reaches down and fists one small hand into Hannibal’s hair, neatly gripping the strands until they are a mess, mussed and fluffy, any gel or styling quickly destroyed in the face of Will’s strength.

“And who owns me?” Hannibal breathes, unable to tear his eyes away from Will’s magnificent face, so sharp in the shadows, each feature brought into glaring relief from the harsh overhead lights.

“*I* own you,” Will responds, and his grip on Hannibal’s hair only tightens. Pain and pleasure spark from the touch, and Hannibal rolls his hips, erection now aching at the feel of Will’s possession (his love).

“Yes,” Hannibal agrees. “You. Only you, darling.”

Will frowns. “I only wish I had something to feed you. I couldn’t—it would have been suspicious. I had to leave her there in the snow as if some *patient* had killed her rather than me.” Will stares into Hannibal’s eyes, and Hannibal is pinned beneath the steady gaze, an insect speared into a corkboard for inspection. “You deserved her heart, Hannibal. You deserved to be fed from her body. It’s the least she could have offered you.”

With trembling hands, Hannibal reaches up and grabs Will’s hips, enamored with the sharp jut of the boy’s hip bones beneath his palms.

“If I cannot feed myself on her,” Hannibal says, “then I suppose I will have to feast myself on you instead.”

Before Will can respond, Hannibal yanks the boy’s shorts to the side and devours his tiny cock in a single, ferocious swallow. It fills his mouth, the most delicious morsel, salt and sweat and musk all coalescing on Hannibal’s tongue as he laves the adorable thing with firm presses and teasing licks.

Will whines and nearly rips Hannibal’s hair straight from the root.

“*Hannibal* ,” Will moans, rolling his hips into Hannibal’s waiting mouth.

Hannibal hums, enjoying the strangled sound Will lets out as the vibrations travel through his erection and up his body, spreading out across his skin in a wave of goosebumps. The small bumps raise the delicate flesh of his torso and arms, and Hannibal knows that, if his mouth were not currently occupied, he would be tracing the ripple of bumps against Will’s skin instead. As it is, Hannibal is happy to continue sucking on Will’s cock, the small thing not quite long enough to touch the back of his throat.

Small drops of precum continue to smear over Hannibal's tongue, the taste like that of ambrosia, and Hannibal moans, eyes rolling into the back of his head as he sucks even harder, eager to wring each and every drop from his boy.

Hannibal releases Will's cock with a wet *pop* and brings his fist up to fondle it, thumb pulling back the foreskin to reveal the sensitive head. Hannibal blows cool air onto the slit, enamored with the bead of liquid that spills forth from the stimulation. Will continues rolling his hips into Hannibal's palm, and Hannibal rubs his nail against the glans beneath the head of Will's cock, his own erection throbbing at the absolutely *wrecked* noise Will lets out.

"Do you like that, darling?" Hannibal coos, the sound of Will's thrusting cock wet and loud in the room, a melody woven within the symphony of their pleasure, Hannibal's own beating heart the percussion and Will's high-pitched moans an aria floating above it all. "I wish I could have been there to witness the creation of your gift. I imagine it so clearly in my mind; the arc of your blade in the air, the spray of blood, steaming, as it hits the snowy ground. The look of surprise and betrayal on Bedelia's face as she realizes you are not a lamb, but a lion, a predator with sharp teeth and a lust for blood."

"Had to be a surprise," Will grits out, hips continuing to rut into Hannibal's palm. The lace on Will's shorts is now completely sodden, drenched in a mixture of Will's sweat and precum and Hannibal's saliva. The fabric clings to Will's pubic hair, the lace molding to each and every wiry curl. Hannibal leans forward and runs his tongue over the silky fabric, sucking it into his mouth and moaning at the taste of Will's musk that floods his senses.

"Still," Hannibal says, releasing the fabric from his mouth and running his tongue over the slit of Will's cock, "I dream of the day I can watch the slaughter with my own eyes."

Will is close; the thrusting of his hips is jerky and uncoordinated, and his balls are tight where they sit against the base of his erection. "Next time," Will moans. "Next time we'll do it together."

Hannibal hums, tightens his fist so that the heat around Will's cock becomes near painful in its intensity. "I am so proud of you, my beloved. So incredibly proud."

It's these words that push Will over the edge, and the boy cries out as he spills into Hannibal's hand. The liquid is viscous and hot, squelching around Will's still-thrusting erection as he chases the last vestiges of his orgasm.

Will finally stops moving his hips, though the rest of his body is alight with motion. His chest heaves, rising and falling with each rapid intake of breath. His legs tremble and quake, not unlike those of a newborn doe. His lashes flutter, the sound whisper-quiet against the smooth skin of his cheeks.

Hannibal removes his hand and brings it to his mouth, savoring each and every drop of seed as he cleans his palm and fingers. His tongue is anything but gentle as he chases the taste of Will's spend on his tongue, disappointed when he devours the liquid and all that remains is the taste of his own tacky sweat.

Will—whose hands have not moved from Hannibal's scalp this entire time—tugs on Hannibal, urging him to stand. Hannibal complies, delighted when the boy stands on his toes and gives Hannibal a searing kiss.

"I love you," Will whispers once they part. A string of thick saliva connects their lips, and Hannibal licks it away, as eager for this as he is for any fine meal or dish presented to him (or, perhaps, even more eager for this, a physical embodiment of his and Will's combined desires).

"And I, you, Mylimasis," Hannibal responds.

Will nudges Hannibal onto the bed, reaching for Hannibal's clothing and proceeding to strip the man with surprisingly efficient movements considering how badly the boy's hands are still trembling. The scent of Will's arousal, spicy and heady, floats like wisps of ash in the air, and Hannibal is not surprised to see that the boy is once again erect, Will's tiny cock barely seen in-between his lithe, pale thighs. Hannibal (finally) removes Will's shorts and exposes the boy completely to his hungry gaze.

Hannibal allows Will to throw his suit onto the ground, ignoring the sight of it (crumpled and wrinkled) on the floor, instead focusing on the glorious image of Will, flushed and writhing, on the bed beneath him. Will's eyes are still dark, his lips swollen and wet, and there's a light sheen of sweat on every inch of his exposed skin.

The scent of blood is still present, exacerbated by the moisture gathering in each of Will's pores. Hannibal cannot help himself from running his nose along Will's wrists, his fingers. He brings the pad of one of Will's fingertips into his mouth and sucks, rolling his tongue along the salty skin. Will whines at this, a high, thready sound, and Hannibal cannot help the chuckle that emerges from his throat.

"I can taste her blood against your skin," Hannibal says. His voice is nearly a whisper, the words torn from his throat like pulling a plant up by its roots, nothing left but a gaping hole where the living thing used to grow. "With all my knowledge and intuition, I could never entirely predict you. I can feed the caterpillar, I can whisper through the chrysalis, but what hatches follows its own nature and is beyond me."

"You helped create me," Will says. "Is this what you wanted?"

Is this what you wanted?

The words echo in Hannibal's mind, tilting and distorting until they form the shadow of some great, hulking beast. The question grows antlers, scraping against the top of Hannibal's brain and expanding out until all Hannibal can think, all he can hear ringing in his ears is Will's words, over and over and over again.

Is this what you wanted?

Is this what he wanted?

Hannibal thinks back to that fateful night, the first time he ever laid eyes on his beloved. He thinks of meeting Will's gaze and discovering that the boy in front of him was an empath, perhaps the only person on the entire planet who might be capable of looking at Hannibal and actually *seeing* him. The thrill of being seen (and still being wanted in turn) was enough to have Hannibal forget all common sense and bring Will back to Baltimore with him. Home.

Even then, Hannibal must have known what he wanted Will to become. And oh, what a becoming it has been. Will has exceeded Hannibal's expectations at every turn, and this final gift (the most important gift Hannibal has ever received, perhaps ever will) only solidifies the idea that, yes, this is *exactly* what Hannibal wanted.

Will misinterprets Hannibal's silence. He begins fidgeting on the bed, fingers twisting and curling, toes scrunching up on top of the comforter. His scent sours with apprehension, and Hannibal immediately leans down to lay against Will, bringing the boy's small, lean body against his own so that there is not a single inch of skin where they are not touching.

"Yes," Hannibal finally says. The word is taken from his lips as if on the wings of a dove, carried over to Will and bringing the boy peace. "Yes, this is what I wanted."

Will sniffs and rubs at his eyes, love and happiness blossoming now and taking the place of his fear. "Good. I think…I think that this is what I wanted, too."

Hannibal groans and presses his nose into the delicate skin beneath Will's jaw, licking at the skin there, *needing* the taste of Will on his tongue. Will immediately responds, clutching Hannibal's biceps and writhing beneath the onslaught of Hannibal's mouth.

Hannibal rolls so he is directly on top of Will and begins grinding down against the boy, the slide of their erections aided, in part, by the copious amounts of precum pouring from Hannibal's cock. It slicks their skin, turns their grinding into a delicious press of silky, heated flesh.

It doesn't take long for Hannibal to reach his peak, and Will succumbs to his second orgasm not long after, a few drops of seed spilling from his cock though the pitiful emission is immediately lost in the sea of Hannibal's own spend.

They lay like that for a moment, Hannibal's arms hovering on either side of Will's torso so he doesn't crush the boy, before Hannibal forces himself to get up and go to the bathroom for a moist washcloth. He cleans Will with long, thorough strokes, gently lifting the boy's soft cock to wipe his sac and perineum, delighted in the quiet mewl Will lets out at the touch against his oversensitive skin.

Hannibal cleans himself as well, deposits the dirty cloth in the laundry hamper, and then climbs back into the bed beside Will. He wraps them in the comforter and draws the boy close, tilting Will's sweaty curls so that they rest beneath his chin. The scent of Will (sated and pleased) fills Hannibal's nose, and he presses himself closer, always closer, though they are already as close as two bodies can be.

"Tell me how it felt," Hannibal asks quietly. "When you killed Bedelia."

Will stills beneath him, though his breathing remains slow. Even. Eventually, he says, “It felt…good. Powerful.” A pause, then, “Righteous.”

Hannibal ponders, not for the first time, on how incredibly advanced Will is for his age. Certainly there are others with powerful minds, those that graduate college at twelve and proceed to get lost in the oblivion of academia, never able to quite return to a normal semblance of life. There are others, still, who mature at a young age from traumatic events placed upon, events which also forbid them to slip back into the worn-out path of mediocrity that has been trodden by so many before and which will continue to be trodden by others long past their deaths.

No, Will is some strange amalgamation of the two. The trauma, the intelligence, Will’s empathy disorder, all of it has combined to create this perfect boy in front of him. A boy capable of seeing into someone’s soul with merely a glance and then using this insight to ruin them, wholly and completely, until his victims are nothing more than a pound of flesh extracted for all its worth and then discarded onto the floor.

“You never cease to amaze me, Will. I do not think there will ever come a day when I am not entranced with your every word, your every move, your every thought and feeling. If I lived a thousand years by your side, it would still not be enough to sate my hunger for you.”

Will shivers in Hannibal’s arms, and Hannibal holds the boy tighter, crushing Will to his chest.

Before they fall asleep, Hannibal asks Will for details, his amusement only growing as Will explains his carefully thought-out plan, from the call originating from Lisa’s cellphone to hiding a scalpel from the basement in his jacket pocket.

When Will is finished, Hannibal can only press gentle kisses to the boy’s head, his scalp, his soft ears that stick out from beneath the mess of his curls.

“I think…I think we were destined to meet,” Will whispers.

“Do you believe in fate?”

“I do now.”

They don’t speak after that, content to listen to one another breath, to feel the pulse of each other’s hearts as they beat and pulse. Their heart rates sync up after a time, and Hannibal falls asleep to the steady rhythm of Will (of himself) like a lullaby etched beneath their skin.

At four in the morning, Hannibal is rudely awakened by the sound of his work phone loudly chiming and buzzing like some kind of bizarre insect. He groans, attempts to rub the sleep from his eyes, and then rolls over to the nightstand to grab the offending device, heart aching at the small whimper that Will gives out from the loss of Hannibal’s heat wrapped around his side.

“Hello?” Hannibal asks. He clears his throat, tries to remove the gravel lodged there. “How may I help you?”

“Is this Hannibal Lecter?”

Ah, Jack Crawford. Hannibal was wondering if the man would be making a call. After all, Hannibal is Bedelia’s mentee, and he was sitting next to her for the majority of the evening. Before, that is, she was so wonderfully murdered. “This is Dr. Lecter, yes.”

“Doctor. Sorry.” The man does not sound in the least bit sorry. “As you are probably aware, there is an ongoing investigation surrounding the gala last night. One of the patrons was… found outside. We would like to get a statement from you as soon as possible.”

Hannibal does not have to fake the wariness in his voice when he asks, “Why would you need a statement from me in particular?”

A pause. Then, “I cannot say at this time. Rest assured, if you come into the station, I promise to answer as many of your questions as possible.”

Hannibal hums, considering. Jack has no legal hold over Hannibal; police are not allowed to force witnesses into giving statements, and Hannibal would be well within his constitutional rights to deny the invitation. However, giving a statement will endear him to Jack and the rest of the police force while also allowing Hannibal to twist the narrative of last night in whatever shape he pleases.

“I will come in,” Hannibal responds.

“Good. Could you bring your son as well? The more witness statements we are able to have, the better.”

Hannibal frowns into the phone. Though Will is wonderful and talented and clever, he is still young, and last night was no doubt extremely trying on him. If Will accidentally slipped up during his statement, it could lead the investigation down a path that neither of them wants or intends.

Then again, having Will speak and defend his own innocence could be a powerful distraction as well. No one expects a child to be able to manipulate a police investigation; no one suspects a child to cause the police investigation in the first place. Yes, having Will come in for a statement would be the best course of action.

Hannibal says, “I will ask him. Will sometimes has trouble speaking with those he has not met before. I do not know if he will be comfortable talking with an officer.”

“Of course. You would be allowed to stay in the room with him the entire time we collect his statement, if you wish.”

Hannibal tilts his head. Cradles the phone against the juncture of his chin and neck. “I will ask him,” Hannibal repeats. “Nevertheless, you can expect me later this morning.”

“Not too late,” Jack says, voice straining with the effort to remain polite. “The sooner, the better.”

“As you wish. Soon, then,” Hannibal says.

“Goodbye, Dr. Lecter.”

Jack hangs up, and Hannibal is struck by how…rude the man is. Unfortunately, not all rude people can be eaten, and Jack falls into the category of people who would be far more trouble than it is worth to kill.

One day, perhaps…

“Is everything okay?”

Hannibal turns, heart skipping a beat at the sight of Will curled up into a ball, his nose tucked into the silk cover of Hannibal’s pillow. The boy’s hair is tangled, knotted curls splayed out across the dark blanket like shavings of bronze and copper. His eyes are half-lidded, lashes fluttering as he tries (and fails) to keep them open. His bare skin is ivory in the moonlight, and Hannibal aches to run his hands across every inch of delicious, exposed flesh.

“Yes, darling. Jack Crawford from the FBI is asking for a statement from me of what transpired last night. And he wants a statement from you as well.”

Will startles, jumping up from the mattress and nearly ramming the back of his head into the headboard. His eyes are no longer heavy, now wide and screaming out with terror. The scent of Will’s fear blooms, decaying fruit flooding the room. “He suspects me. He thinks I murdered Bedelia. Oh god, Hannibal, I’m so *sorry*.”

Tears prick Will’s eyes, turning them into glittering sapphire. Hannibal coos and draws the trembling boy into his arms, running his palms over the boy’s bare back, feeling the sweat collect beneath his hands as the boy’s quivering only worsens.

“No, Will, you are under no suspicion. Jack merely wants our statements on what we saw, if anything. Bedelia sat at our table; I danced with her during the course of the evening. It is only our relation to her that draws Jack’s eye, not suspicion.”

Will continues to shake, and he grips Hannibal’s chest hair, small nails digging half-crescents into the thatch of wiry curls. “I messed up. I’m sorry. I’m sorry.”

Will repeats the missive over and over again, and Hannibal can only rock the boy in his arms, offering words of comfort in any language that slips into his mind. English, French, Italian, Lithuanian. By the time Hannibal starts to speak in Japanese, Will finally begins to calm.

“Better?” Hannibal asks, running a hand through Will’s hair.

“Yes. Sorry.”

“Do not apologize, Mylimasis. I should be the one asking forgiveness. It was not my intention to scare you when I brought up Mr. Crawford’s request.”

“I know. I can tell when you scare me on purpose.”

Hannibal grins, teeth shining in the moonlight, and tucks his smile against Will’s cheek. “Of course you do, clever boy. I think it would be…beneficial for the both of us to provide

statements, both as a way of corroborating our stories and also as a method of turning suspicion elsewhere. Jack wishes to meet soon. Do you feel you are able to go to the police station? I would remain with you the entire time. We can practice your statement on the drive over."

Will sighs. Continues playing with Hannibal's chest hair. Eventually, he whispers, "Fine. But only if you stay by my side."

"Always," Hannibal promises. "I will *always* stay by your side."

Will has never been inside of a police station before. He has certainly committed crimes before (not the least of which being murder), but for all his pick-pocketing, trespassing, and general vagrancy over the years, he had never ended up behind the nondescript walls and coffee-stained carpets that seem to make up the majority of precincts.

Jack Crawford is there to greet the two of them when they arrive, escorting them through security before walking them down a long, gray hallway into an even longer, grayer room. There's a mirror on one side and a metal table in the middle, and Will clings to Hannibal even as he tries to project calm.

Jack eyes Will with sympathy, muttering, "This will only take a few minutes, son," before leaving the room so that it is only Hannibal and Will inside.

Will sits in one of the chairs—metal, each leg soldered to the floor—and starts to shiver. His thick winter coat does nothing against the chill of the room or the feeling of fear (the feeling that, now that Will is inside the police station, he will never be allowed to leave) that pervades every atom in his body.

"Relax," Hannibal murmurs, gracefully sitting in his own metal chair, not unlike a king descending upon his throne. "I am very proud of you, Will. It's so very brave of you to come and give Mr. Crawford a statement."

The undercurrent of those words (that Hannibal is proud because of the reason why they are in the police station at all) melts Will's fears somewhat, and Will slumps against the back of the chair, his hair tickling the nape of his neck. The knotted strands are still damp from the hasty shower Hannibal and Will had taken before driving to the station at this ungodly hour.

Jack returns to the room, a manilla file folder in one hand, a black recording device in the other. He sets both on the table, then looks to Hannibal for a moment before turning his gaze to Will.

If Will thought *he* was tired, it is nothing compared to the bone-deep fatigue that sits in every line of Jack's face. It expresses itself in the slump of his shoulders, in the bags beneath his brown eyes, in the downward curl of his mouth (enhanced, in part, by the soul patch beneath the man's bottom lip). His entire body radiates discomfort, a fevered passion covered in swaths of exhaustion. Will would almost feel bad for the man if he weren't currently investigating a murder caused by Will (and which Will would commit again in a heartbeat, if only to see the pride on Hannibal's face when he realized what Will had given him).

“I’m going to ask Hannibal for his statement first,” Jack says, eyes never straying from Will’s face. “In order for that to happen, I must ask you to leave the room.”

Will’s eyes go wide, scared. He turns to Hannibal and bites down on his bottom lip, his teeth nearly breaking through the delicate flesh. “You said we would stay together the entire time,” Will whispers.

Hannibal opens his mouth, but before he can respond, Jack says, “Sorry, it’s protocol. Can’t have you corroborating your statements. Hannibal needs to give his statement alone.”

Will can tell Hannibal is not amused by the interruption, nor the turn this morning is taking.

“First Hannibal,” Jack repeats, “then Will can come in and give his statement after.”

Will sighs, draws his shoulder together, and rises from the chair. “Fine. Where should I go?”

“Just wait outside the door. This should only take a few minutes.”

Will nods, expression pinched, and shoves his hand into his coat pocket. He uses the other to open the metal door, wincing at the high-pitched squeak it lets out from being opened so roughly. Will walks back to the hallway and drops down into another metal chair, this one not bolted to the ground. He sits there in silence, eyeing the empty hall with wariness.

In the distance, there’s a strange noise…a giggle? Then a small head pops up from around the corner and before Will can blink there’s a short, black-haired girl standing in front of him.

“Hi!” the girl chirps, waving one of her tiny hands back and forth. Will glances down the hall, but there is no one else, no parent or guardian looking for a missing or wandering child. The girl notices Will’s glance and lets out another giggle. “Don’t worry,” she says, “Mom will be looking for me soon.”

Will sighs and wraps his coat tighter around his body. “Okay.”

The girl tilts her head, then opens her mouth wide. Will notices she’s missing two of her front teeth and her tongue is poking through the gap, pink and probing and wriggling around. It gives Will the impression that he is looking at some strange, alien creature rather than a little girl. “I’m Beverly. What’s your name?”

Will shuffles his feet beneath the chair, the tops of his toes barely long enough to scrape against the dirty gray carpet. “I’m Will.”

Silence. The girl continues to stare at Will for a moment before letting out another loud, echoing giggle. “You don’t like to talk much, do you? That’s okay. Mom says I can talk enough for two people. Maybe three, on a bad day. I’m six. How old are you? You don’t look very old, but you are taller than me, and sometimes it can be hard to tell, especially with boys. Boys are weird. Are you weird? You don’t look weird, but that’s hard to tell sometimes, too.”

There’s a tittering noise, then a tall, thin woman with dark hair the same shade as the girl’s comes striding down the hall, a frown pressed firmly over her thin lips. “*Beverly*,” she scolds.

“What did I tell you about wandering off?” The woman is wearing a police uniform, though hers is neatly pressed and ironed, unlike most of the officers Will has seen before in his life, including the parade of officers that invaded the gala last night. Apparently irons are out of fashion with the current generation of police.

Beverly shrugs, completely unconcerned at being caught breaking the rules, and keeps her focus entirely glued to Will.

Will feels…tired. Ancient. Compared to the bubbly, bright girl in front of him, Will feels like a veritable wet blanket.

“Sorry,” the woman says, scooping Beverly into her arms. She presses a tender kiss to Beverly’s temple, and Will feels something drag inside of his stomach, something deep and aching.

Longing. He feels longing. Though Hannibal has given Will everything he possibly can, the man still cannot turn back time and give Will a proper childhood. A proper family. A mother that stayed. That loved him, that pressed soft kisses to his head and sang him lullabies to sleep and protected him from the wrath of his father. Though Will knows there is nothing to it now (that no matter how much he wishes, nothing can reverse time and change the way things were), the longing still remains like a heavy stone inside of his abdomen.

Beverly gives Will a cheerful wave goodbye before she is toted down the hall. By the time she disappears around the corner once more, the metal door to Will’s left is being opened, and Jack sticks his head out to retrieve Will.

Will stands, squares his shoulders, and follows the large man inside. Hannibal is sitting exactly as Will left him, long legs folded at the knee, his eyebrow arched in a delicate wave as he motions for Will to sit at his side. Will practically collapses back into the metal chair, eager to give Jack his statement and then go home and sleep (hopefully for another few hours, if not for another few days).

“Will,” Jack drawls, reaching into the folder to draw out a piece of paper. “Because of your age, I’ll have Hannibal, as your legal guardian, sign these forms. The forms merely guarantee that you are saying the truth and only the truth, under penalty of law. Do you understand?”

Will nods his head, grateful that Jack is not talking to Will in that patronizing tone so many adults adopt when talking to anyone younger than themselves, almost as if they were communicating with someone who didn’t understand their language rather than someone who just happened to be conceived at a later rotation of the earth.

“Great,” Jack says, sliding the form over to Hannibal to sign. “Why don’t you tell me about your experience last night, from the moment you arrived at the gala until you left.”

Will glances over at Hannibal for strength, and Hannibal smiles and dips his chin. His eyes are warm. Loving.

You can do this, his eyes seem to say. *I believe in you*.

Will wants to cry. No one has ever believed in him before. No one except Hannibal, that is. The weight of Hannibal's affection drapes itself like a warm cloak over Will's back, and suddenly he is no longer cold, now filled to the brim with confidence because surely if Hannibal believes in him then Will can accomplish anything. Hannibal does not deign to give his time and attention to the unremarkable. If Hannibal believes in Will, then it must be because Will is someone worth believing in.

"I came to the gala with Hannibal," Will begins. "I remember that by the time we got there, lots of people had already arrived. I met someone named Dr. Chilton." Will manages to suppress his wince at the mention of the odious man, but only just. "Bedelia and Lisa came later. The four of us were assigned to sit next to each other for dinner. There were lots of different dishes brought out. It took a long time for us to finish eating, though Lisa didn't really eat much."

Will pauses. This next part of his statement is the most crucial.

This next part is the lie.

If Will can't manage to convince Jack Crawford that he is telling the truth, he risks exposing himself or, worse, implicating and exposing Hannibal. Will's mask is new, not tried-and-tested like Hannibal's or hidden behind perfume and painted lips like Bedelia's was, but he must wear it nonetheless.

"Then everyone went to the ballroom to dance. Hannibal danced with Bedelia first. I thought it was all pretty boring. I hid in a corner for most of the dancing. Then a bunch of officers showed up and you took Lisa away for questioning."

Jack leans back in his chair and crosses his arms over his chest, though Will suspects that this is more for comfort than in an attempt to be intimidating. "And did you ever leave the ballroom for any reason at all after dinner?"

Will nods. "Yeah, I went to the bathroom once. There was one down the hall."

"Did you hear or see anything strange while you went to the bathroom?"

Will bites his bottom lip. "I heard sirens. Hannibal noticed I was missing and went to come find me. He heard the sirens, too."

Jack is still for a moment. Silent. Will's heart is racing so fast in his chest that he feels as though he might pass out. A thick layer of sweat coats both of his palms, and Will is glad his coat covers his arms, otherwise Jack would be able to see the goosebumps lining his skin.

Finally, Jack says, "Very well. Thank you for providing us with a statement. Both of you. I doubt it will be necessary, but I may have some follow-up questions as the investigation proceeds. You might be hearing from me again."

Will keeps his face blank, though inside he shudders at the thought of another session like this. Hannibal nods his understanding and stands, reaching out a hand to help Will stand as

well. Together, they walk from the room and down the gray hall, not stopping until they reach the Bentley where Hannibal had parked it out front of the police station.

“You did very well,” Hannibal tells Will once they are seated inside. Will lifts a trembling hand to turn up the heat in the car, teeth chattering as he tries to regain some warmth. The sweat coating his skin has cooled now that the stress has passed, and it turns his skin tacky and cold beneath his coat.

“I was scared,” Will admits. “More scared, even, than when I held the scalpel over Bedelia’s heart. Is that bad?”

Hannibal laughs, the sound low and smoky as it fills the inside of the car, and Will cannot repress the shiver that runs up his spine (though this shiver is purely from the way that even something as simple as Hannibal’s laughter is enough to have Will’s body bending in reaction, not from the cold, which is slowly dissipating like the mist over a stream in the early morning). “No, darling. Not bad. Fear certainly has its place during a hunt: only a fool would ignore the instincts that nature has granted us. Still, it is much easier to feel afraid when the hunt is finished and the heat, the passion, has cooled from our blood. There is no passion in giving a statement to the police. Thus, the fear returns, eating at the remains of our passion like decay eats away at a fallen tree.”

Will snorts and rubs at his tired eyes. “If there ever comes a day when you stop speaking in poetry and riddles, I’ll know the real you has died and been replaced by a clone.”

Hannibal lets out a long-suffering sigh and ignores Will’s comment, pointedly turning on the radio to allow something other than conversation to fill their ears. Will smirks and slumps into his seat, content to let the classical wash over his ears and lap away the remaining stress still coiled in his muscles.

Once back at home, Will follows through on his earlier daydreaming and immediately collapses into the bed. He sleeps on and off until late that evening. When he finally forces himself to leave the warm, soft covers of the bed, Will stumbles downstairs to find Hannibal hard at work preparing dinner.

“Hello, love,” Hannibal greets, placing a kiss to Will’s temple (an echo of what Will witnessed earlier in the day, though this kiss is so much better simply because it is Hannibal’s lips providing the comfort rather than anyone else).

“Hello,” Will says. He hops up onto one of the bar stools and sits, content to watch Hannibal work. His strong hands are always so mesmerizing. Will adores the olive-tone of Hannibal’s skin, lighter during these past months from the lack of sun. Will wonders if his skin will tan in the summer (and the thought of Hannibal, tan and sweaty in the summer sun, is enough to have Will squirming in his seat). Hannibal’s every movement is graceful, a dance of precision as he slices through fruit and flesh alike. Hannibal’s veins throb beneath the skin of his hands, and Will is entranced at the way they bulge and flex with every twist of Hannibal’s wrist.

“See something you like, darling?” Hannibal asks, amused.

Will sticks out his tongue in response and continues watching. This is a show for him after all (Hannibal always does so enjoy an audience). After a moment, Will asks, "What are you going to do on Monday? Bedelia is no longer around to teach you." Will cannot keep the smug pride from his voice, and Hannibal smiles at the sound.

"That is correct. I assume Lisa will call at some point and postpone my mentorship. She will also have to make referrals for all of Bedelia's current clients. A pity; I rather enjoyed working with some of them."

Will frowns. "Are you disappointed, then? That you can't work with them anymore?"

Hannibal sets down his knife and turns to face Will, all attention entirely now focused on him. Hannibal's maroon eyes scan over Will's own before straying down to Will's nose and then, finally, Will's lips. Will cannot help the sudden urge he has to open his mouth and lick across his bottom lip. He's rewarded for this action with a low growl from Hannibal, the man's (endlessly beautiful) hands gripping tight against the kitchen counter as he continues to stare.

"I am hardly ever disappointed," Hannibal says. His nostrils flare, and he finally tears his gaze away from Will's mouth. "It is simply a change. A transition. And like all transitions, I expect there will be some minor difficulties along the way, though certainly nothing I am unprepared to handle."

Will doesn't feel any better about that. "I don't want to make your life difficult, Hannibal. I just want to make it better."

"And you have, my love. Do not ever doubt that for a moment."

Will is certainly doubting it now.

Hannibal sighs, puts the cut meat into a pan to sear (Will thinks it looks like loin, though from what animal he cannot tell, though he certainly has a guess), wipes his hands along his pristine apron, and then comes round the bar so that he is standing next to Will.

"So many doubts," Hannibal murmurs, tucking a strand of hair behind Will's ear. Will flushes and curls his toes, unhappy with himself, with the lingering doubt that echoes in the back of his mind telling him he will never be enough, that Hannibal is merely placating him, that Hannibal is disgusted and annoyed by what Will has done.

"Can you blame me?" Will asks.

"Blame you? No, never. But I shall strive to change your mind."

Hannibal strokes a finger along Will's forehead and then returns to the other side of the bar, flipping the meat so that it doesn't burn. Will aches at the loss, his entire body colder now that Hannibal is no longer at his side.

"How are you going to change my mind?" Will asks. "Anything you say, I've already told myself before. It's like…it's like there's this shield inside my brain, and no matter what I

throw at it, the anxiety doesn't leave, blocked by my own stupid thoughts."

Hannibal hums and finishes cooking the loin, plating it with a neat flourish before adding the seared asparagus and paella to the side. He motions for Will to follow him into the dining room, and together they sit, nearly touching, before digging into their food.

Will is proud of how slowly he takes his first bite, at how he savors each flavor that presents itself to him in turn (the slight bitterness of the asparagus, the spiced heat of the loin, the saffron infused into every grain of the paella). Will moans around the bite and then swallows.

Will is unsurprised to find Hannibal staring at him when he looks up from his plate. Hannibal's eyes are dark, pupils completely dilated as he once again cannot turn his gaze from Will's lips. Will's skin tingles beneath the gaze, almost as if it were a physical touch, and Will can feel his cheeks heat as Hannibal continues to stare without speaking.

"How are you going to change my mind?" Will repeats, as if the two of them are simply carrying on their conversation from before without any interruption.

Hannibal breaks his stare and takes a sip of wine from the glass near his plate. "I have an idea. It is a rather unorthodox treatment, but I feel it might be best in this situation." Another sip. Then, "I want to spank you."

Will drops his fork onto his plate, ignoring the way it splatters his paella and becomes instantly covered in rice and sauce. No, he is much too focused on the very specific word that just left Hannibal's mouth.

"What."

Hannibal smirks, attempts to cover the smirk by lifting up the napkin folded in his lap, and then clears his throat. "It will be a punishment, but one I think you will enjoy. You are berating yourself Will, and as you said before, no matter what you or I say, your brain is continuing its unending tirade. With a punishment like spanking, there's a release of built-up tension. Once it is over, the slate is wiped clean, and the two of us can continue on as before. There will be no guilt, no anger, no worry. Just a smooth path forward."

Will bites down on his bottom lip and sucks up the release of fresh blood. It blends with the taste of loin still in his mouth, and Will wonders for a moment what raw meat tastes like (wonders if he will ever have the chance to sink his teeth into someone's flesh and taste the blood and muscle straight from the source).

The blood is only a distraction, though. Will's mind instantly turns back to the word *spank* , his brain still trying to process the fact that such a word left Hannibal's mouth.

In all their time together, Hannibal has never hit Will. Not like that. He has certainly been rough (and really, there's nothing Will loves more than being shoved onto Hannibal's cock, whether it is his mouth or his hole), but never has Hannibal raised a hand against Will. The last time something like that happened was…

“Darling, talk to me. What is on your mind?”

“You’ve never hit me before,” Will whispers. He clenches his hands into fists, places them on his lap. “Your punishments…they’ve never been physical.”

“Oh, love, this punishment is not about causing you pain. At least, not entirely. There is pleasure to be derived from some types of pain. You enjoy when I pull on your hair, yes?”

Will’s flush deepens, but he forces himself to nod at Hannibal’s question. “You know I do.”

“I believe spanking will be another type of stimulation that provides you with both pleasure and pain. The goal is not to hurt you Will. Never to hurt you.”

Will nurses his split lip and shifts in his seat, considering. Hannibal does not rush an answer, his eyes steady and sure as they gaze at Will with an overwhelming amount of love.

“Okay,” Will eventually says. “If you think it will help me not feel so worried over what I’ve done, then yes. I’m okay with you…spanking me.”

Hannibal’s eyes sparkle. “And remember, you always have your word if you wish to stop.”

Will nods, equal parts embarrassed and turned on, and shoves a bite of food into his mouth.

They finish their dinner quickly, both eager to go upstairs (though for very different reasons; Hannibal is clearly eager to begin spanking Will, and Will is just eager for this entire thing to be over).

Once inside their bedroom, Hannibal orders Will to strip so that he is completely naked.

“What about you?” Will asks, sliding his sweater over his head and placing it on the chair for later. “Are you going to be undressed?”

“No, Will. This evening is about you, not me.”

Will pouts but doesn’t argue. He is sure there will never be a day when he *doesn’t* want Hannibal’s glorious body on display, each inch of sculpted muscle and wiry hair that covers Hannibal a work of art that Will falls in love with each and every time it is exposed.

“What now?” Will asks, voice still leaning toward petulant rather than repentant. Hannibal merely smirks at the tone and then pats his clothed thigh.

“Up here,” he says. “Lay across my lap.”

If Will thought he had felt embarrassed earlier at dinner, it is *nothing* compared to the flames of mortification that flood his body now. His entire frame heats up, crimson staining his pale skin from his cheeks all the way down to where his cock sits, soft, against his pubic hair. Will’s movements are stilted as he obeys, climbing up onto the bed and splaying himself over Hannibal’s bent legs. His head is tilted down, his ass raised in the air. Will’s curls fall forward and provide a shield, a cover, something that, no matter how paltry, is available to hide his shame.

“Perfect,” Hannibal says. He rubs a broad palm over one of Will’s cheeks, and Will’s body jolts at the soft, unexpected touch. “Your word?”

“Red,” Will gasps, suddenly unable to breathe. There’s so much swirling around his head; guilt over making Hannibal’s life harder, pride at what he did to Bedelia, embarrassment over his current position, fear from the idea of Hannibal’s hand striking him, and, buried beneath it all, the smallest hint of arousal (an arousal that always seems to be simmering in his veins whenever he is in Hannibal’s company).

“Good boy. Take a deep breath for me. That’s it, nice and slow. The first few strikes will be light. I want to ease you into this. Remember, this is for you, so your mind can be clear and free.”

Will rolls his eyes and huffs out a pained breath. “Yeah, yeah. For me. Got it.”

“Impertinent boy.” Hannibal’s voice is endlessly fond as he continues rubbing Will’s skin, his hand meandering from Will’s bottom down to where his ass curves against his thighs, then further still to the back of Will’s knees, an area Will has never considered particularly sensitive before until Hannibal’s hands begin stroking the delicate skin.

When Hannibal continues to do nothing but stroke Will’s skin, Will cannot help himself from relaxing. His heart rate slows from a gallop to a steady thrum, and Will’s cock begins to perk up against Hannibal’s leg, conditioned to respond to being naked around the older man.

SLAP.

The first hit is more sound than sensation, but Will still jolts at the sudden smack, unable to hold in the cry he lets out at the sudden sting. Hannibal’s hand glances off the meat of his ass, sending the area spiraling into heat. It burns for a moment before returning to normal, and Will is surprised to find he misses the heat as soon as it leaves his skin (not that he would ever admit such a thing to Hannibal).

“That’s one,” Hannibal says, voice calm as ever. “I’ll count them for you this time. However, in the future, I expect you to count each strike yourself.”

Will cannot believe that Hannibal is already planning on doing this again. Will isn’t sure he will survive this round, let alone another.

Hannibal’s flat palm comes down again, this time on the other cheek, leaving a matching mark of heat on Will’s tender flesh. “Two.”

The next few strikes alternate sides, first the right, then the left. Will begins to drift once more, relaxing into the familiar rush of heat that blooms beneath his skin before it is soon soothed by the cool air of the bedroom. Will’s shaft is still hard, the tip leaking small drops of precum that soak into the expensive fabric of Hannibal’s trousers. Will smiles as he imagines the mess he is making (imagines Hannibal having to explain just to the dry cleaners just what, exactly, is staining the front of his pants).

When Will feels like he might be melting, his body limp and pliant beneath Hannibal's strong arms, his face red from where it's hanging over the side of Hannibal's legs, that's when Hannibal decides to strike somewhere different.

Hard.

SLAP.

This hit *hurts*. It's not just a dull burn but a sharp, stinging pain at the base of Will's ass, right at the top of his leg.

Will lets out a keening sound, something high and thready, his entire body jerking away from the point of contact. Hannibal's calm, smooth voice says, "Seven," as if nothing has occurred, and then proceeds to spank Will again in the same exact spot.

The pain intensifies, and Will feels tears beginning to flood his eyes. Each slap sends a thread of pleasure-pain radiating out from where Hannibal's broad palm connects with Will's flesh, and before long Will is a writhing bundle of nerves, unsure where the pain ends and the pleasure begins.

"Please," Will begs, though for what he is not sure. "Please."

"Hush, darling. You are doing so well for me. Just a few more."

Will shakes his head, tears flying out onto the floor, unable to imagine how can take even one more, let alone a few. "Please," he whimpers again.

Hannibal hums and strokes his hand along Will's burning flesh, the feel of Hannibal's fingertips like sandpaper against Will's raw skin. Every sensation is magnified, from the scrape of Hannibal's nails against his flesh to the rush of cool air from the room to the beads of sweat condensing along his body. Will twists and turns, but Hannibal's hold is tight. Unmoving. Will is well and truly stuck.

And Will…likes it. He enjoys the knowledge that Hannibal is strong enough to hold him down, takes comfort in the fact that Hannibal will give Will his punishment and then the slate will be wiped clean, no hurt feelings or guilt left between them. As Hannibal brings his palm down for one final spank, Will is surprised by his orgasm, suddenly awash in endless waves of pleasure so powerful that they physically hurt to experience. His eyes roll back into his head, and Will doesn't realize he's being moved until he presses his nose into Hannibal's neck and finds that Hannibal is cradling Will to his body and gently rocking him side to side.

"Shh," Hannibal whispers. "So good for me, Mylimasis. My brave boy. I am so proud of you."

Will cries and cries. The tears are cleansing, wiping away any remaining negative feelings he has towards himself. The tears slow, then stop altogether, and still Hannibal holds Will tight as if even a single inch between them would be too devastating a loss to bear.

“I’m okay,” Will eventually says. His nose is stopped up, and Hannibal reaches over to the nightstand and grabs a clean tissue, ignoring Will’s outstretched hand to instead press the tissue to Will’s nose himself. Will is too tired to feel embarrassed as he blows his nose, letting out everything inside. Hannibal coos at him and removes the used tissue, crumpling it up and placing it in the trash can next to the bed.

“Let me take care of you,” Hannibal says, and how could Will ever say no to such a request?

Will nods, and Hannibal lifts Will into the air, carrying him from the bedroom and into the bathroom. He turns on the tub and fills it with tepid water, the feel of it a balm against Will’s overheated skin. Hannibal drops some oil into the tub (something sharp and citrus that Will instantly adores) before stripping out of his clothing and getting into the water behind Will.

Will sighs and tilts his head back so that it rests against the thick hair on Hannibal’s chest. Hannibal nuzzles the space behind Will’s ear, and his warm breath tickles as it blows out against Will’s hair.

“How do you feel?” Hannibal asks, grabbing a fresh washcloth and lathering it with soap before gently dragging it along Will’s arms.

“I feel…” Will pauses, chews on his bottom lip as he thinks. His entire body is sore, the backs of his thighs and ass throbbing with each beat of his heart. His nose is still slightly runny, and his eyes are red-rimmed and irritated from crying. Still, Will cannot help but say, “I feel lighter, somehow. Like I’m suddenly able to breathe deeply, where before there was a weight on my lungs. Does that make sense?”

“Perfect sense.” Hannibal’s chest rumbles as he speaks, and Will leans further back, soaking up the vibrations and adoring the way they feel against his own skin.

Hannibal finishes washing Will, and Will turns so that he is straddling Hannibal in the water, borrowing the used washcloth to clean Hannibal in turn. He lingers on Hannibal’s abdomen, swiping soapy water over each of the defined muscles. They clench and contract as Hannibal breathes and shifts, and Will thinks that, if the world were to end in that moment, he would still be stuck in that tub staring at Hannibal’s glorious body without a second thought to the destruction raining down around them.

Eventually, the water turns from tepid to cool, and they both leave the bath and dry off with fluffy towels. They return to bed without dressing into their clothes. Hannibal offers to put some cream on Will’s bottom, but Will refuses, eager to feel the sting (the physical manifestation of Hannibal’s love) for as long as possible.

The next day is spent at home. Hannibal (tries) to teach Will how to play the theremin, which ends up being a lesson more on patience than any actual technical skill.

“It sounds like I’m killing it,” Will pouts, hands hovering over the strange instrument.

“Don’t kill it,” Hannibal responds blithely, his own hands covering Will’s in an attempt to guide the boy through the proper movements. “A theremin is an instrument which can create exquisite music without ever needing to be touched.”

Hannibal nuzzles the back of Will's neck and begins kissing along his jaw. Will leans into the touch, letting out a quiet moan as Hannibal's kisses turn to long, drawn-out presses of his plush lip against Will's sensitive skin.

Hannibal leans back, ignoring Will's huff, and continues talking as though he never stopped. "It requires the rare gift of perfect pitch to play properly. Smaller movements. Feel the vibration move through you."

Slowly, ever-so-slowly, Hannibal moves one of his hands down until it rests against the top of Will's thigh. Will's own hands jerk at the sudden touch, sending the pitch of the theremin wobbling into new levels of tortured agony. Hannibal lets out a quiet laugh and continues his touch, gripping Will's thigh with a sure hand.

"Feel it here," Hannibal whispers.

The melody sways, bends, and Will cannot help but feel awe that he is creating music from… nothing. "Like composing in thin air," Will breathes.

"Thin air is a musician's canvas."

Will wants to respond, but then Hannibal's hand is cupping his pelvis, and Will bucks into the touch, his cock instantly hardening beneath the steady pressure.

And so it is that Hannibal takes Will apart while Will tries (and fails) to continue playing the damned instrument. When Hannibal takes Will's cock out from his trousers and begins to stroke it, the melody wobbles and bends, spiraling around the room like a top spun tight and then let loose.

Hannibal's pace increases, and with it the music churns higher and higher until Will comes with a loud cry, the sound of his voice mixing with the high-pitched strain of the theremin, both weaving together until Will cannot tell where he ends and the melody begins.

Hannibal's own erection grinds against Will's covered bottom, and they both groan at the feel of moisture that floods Hannibal's pants as he comes simply from rubbing against Will like a cat in heat.

When Monday rolls around, Will wakes to find Hannibal sitting with his phone in hand, the faintest hint of a smile etched over his lips.

"What is it?" Will slurs, still half asleep.

"I just received a call from Agent Crawford. It seems as though Lisa has been arrested as an accessory for the murder of Bedelia."

Will's heart skips a beat in his chest. "Oh? And is that…good?"

"It is." Hannibal shifts, runs a hand along Will's stomach. "I think it is time you and I took another trip."

Will scrunches up his nose. "Why?"

“Why not? I am not currently employed, and the weather here is rather dreadful. I think a change of scenery would be good for us both.”

Will tilts his head and begins to smile, imagining the many, many hours of Hannibal’s time available for him to take (to hoard) now that Bedelia is no longer a part of their lives.

“Okay,” Will says. “Let’s go on a trip.”

Riding Out the Storm

Chapter Summary

Hannibal and Will travel to Italy as they wait for the investigation into Bedelia's death to subside.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Hannibal watches, amused, as Will squirms on the leather couch. He shifts from one leg to the other, trying (and failing) to adjust his weight in a way that doesn't cause pain. His adorable nose is scrunched up. His bottom lip is swollen from being bit over and over again, faint scabs adorning the delicate skin. Will's cheeks are flushed, yet still he refuses to ask for the cream that Hannibal has sitting, waiting, in his bag.

"Are you sure—"

"Don't," Will bites out. "I'm fine."

His vicious, darling boy. Hannibal sighs, besotted. "Very well. But the salve *is* there if you need it."

"I know. You told me already."

"And yet you still suffer. Do you enjoy the pain, Mylimasis? The reminder that you are owned? That I will always be there to catch you when you fall?"

Will whimpers (both from the words and the pain), and slides closer to Hannibal on the couch. The stale air of the plane does nothing to hide Will's scent. It blossoms with arousal and pain, a heady mixture. Hannibal bends down and presses his nose to Will's curls, content to breathe in the scent for the remainder of their flight.

The plane tilts, and Will's hand shoots out, grabbing onto Hannibal's forearm with a fierce grip.

"Would you like to be distracted again?" Hannibal asks.

"No. I thought the pain would be enough. It *is* enough." Will sighs, loosens his grip. "I'm fine. Sorry."

"Do not apologize, darling." Hannibal slides his arm around Will's waist and pulls the boy into his lap. Will's weight is a comforting thing on Hannibal's thighs. He relishes the strength

in Will's legs, the plush skin of his bottom, the way his torso curves toward Hannibal like the stalk of a flower reaching toward the sun.

Will moves around on Hannibal's lap in an attempt to get comfortable. He frowns and then stops moving when, no matter how he turns, the pain and ache from his spanking remains. Hannibal can feel the swell of Will's tiny cock pressed against his stomach.

"Are you sure you wouldn't like a distraction?" Hannibal purrs, reaching down between their bodies to rub the heel of his palm against Will's erection.

Will whines, jerks. The musk in his scent spikes and floods Hannibal's nose. Hannibal flares his nostrils, inhaling even deeper, savoring the scent of Will's arousal as if it were the finest cologne (and Hannibal thinks he would gladly wear the smell of Will's arousal at all times, bottle the boy's lust and then dab it on his collarbones each morning when he wakes).

"Please," Will whispers. His thin hips thrust forward, grinding his cock further against Hannibal's palm.

"Please what? Please give you pleasure? Please give you pain? Perhaps I should bend you over my knee and bruise you further. Your ivory skin looks so lovely when painted in red and purple, darling."

"Hurt me," Will begs. "Make me forget."

"Forget what?" Hannibal asks. He raises his hand, gently runs it through Will's curls. When he reaches the base of Will's neck, he grabs the silky hair in a punishing grip and *yanks*, forcing Will's back to curve so that the boy is precariously leaning over the edge of the couch, held up only by Hannibal's arm around his waist and Hannibal's fingers in his hair.

"What do you want to forget?" Hannibal repeats. He digs his nails into the delicate flesh of Will's scalp. Hannibal feels skin and hair give beneath the sharp pressure, the edges of his nails scraping further into Will's neck. "Tell me."

"Everything but you!" Will cries out. There are tears streaming from his eyes. His hips still thrust and grind, the front of his trousers wet and stained with precum. "I want to forget everything but *you*."

Obsession claws its way around Hannibal's heart. It grips the organ in a vice-like hold, tightening inside of Hannibal's body until every beat of his heart, every pulse in his veins, every pump of blood is an echo of *Will*.

"Darling, I would *die* for you," Hannibal growls. "Throw myself from the nearest cliff, crash into the cool waters below simply to put a smile on your face. I would carve out my heart, drain the blood from my veins if it meant another second in your presence. I would sail across the sea, traverse mountains and deserts alike for even a chance at seeing your faultless face again. I love you, Mylimasis. I love you."

Will is bawling, deep sobs that shake his tiny frame. His eyes are swimming in tears when he manages to open them once more. The blue of his gaze is endless in its depth. Black pupils

blown. Will pulls away from Hannibal's punishing grip on his hair and rests his face in the crook of Hannibal's neck. Hannibal draws him closer, wraps his arm tighter around Will's waist.

"I love you," Will whispers into Hannibal's skin. Hannibal imagines the words melting into his flesh, combining with cells there until Will's vow is sealed beneath his muscle and bone, never to be removed. "God, I love you."

Hannibal hums, rubs Will's back. Will is still hard, but he seems more intent on burying himself into the juncture of Hannibal's jaw rather than achieving an orgasm. A few more minutes, then Will leans back. His eyes are red-rimmed and damp. His dark lashes curve downwards, heavy with unshed tears. Hannibal cannot help but lean forward and lick at the boy's cheeks, cleaning the lingering remnants of salt from his skin.

"Do you still wish to hurt?" Hannibal asks, gentle and delicate.

"Yes," Will breathes. "I think I do. I like pain when it's from you."

Oh, his darling is *perfect*.

With a growl low in his throat, Hannibal bends down and bites at the exposed skin of Will's neck. His teeth break the pale skin, spill fresh blood that is quickly lapped away by Hannibal's dexterous tongue. The taste is ambrosia inside of his mouth, salty and tangy with a hint of sweetness that causes Hannibal's cock to swell within his slacks.

"The taste of you is exquisite," Hannibal says. "I wish I could drink from you every day, savor your blood on my tongue, have it spill into my belly and fill me to bursting."

"It's yours," Will whines. "You can have it. I don't care, it's all for you."

Hannibal laps at Will's neck as more ruby drops spill from the fresh wound. He reaches his hand down between their bodies once more, giving Will something to writhe against as Hannibal continues to attack the boy's throat. Hannibal imagines the way Will's neck will look the next week as it slowly heals, the skin turning from dark purple to red to ivory (a blank canvas for Hannibal to paint again and again).

"Are you going to come for me?" Hannibal asks. Will's hips work in short, quick thrusts. Each shove forward places Hannibal's palm against the short length of Will's cock. The fabric of Will's pants is sticky and moist. It catches on Hannibal's skin, tacky, and Hannibal removes his hand for a brief moment to lick at his palm, catching the faintest hint of Will's musk on his tongue. It mixes with the taste of Will's blood, and Hannibal groans, entranced at the combination of the two.

Will's hips stutter, his eyes heavy as he stares at Hannibal's lips. He sways forward and licks at Hannibal's mouth, tasting himself on Hannibal's tongue.

Hannibal lets go of Will's waist (entranced by the whine Will gives at the loss of Hannibal's arm around him) and places his hand on Will's curved back. Hannibal trails his hand lower,

lower, until he reaches the band of Will's trousers. Quickly, like the striking of a snake, Hannibal shoves his hand into Will's clothing and plunges his dry finger into Will's hole.

Will tosses his head back and comes with a loud cry. Hannibal continues thrusting his finger in and out of Will's rim, delighting in the way the muscle clings to him, drawing him further into Will's warm, welcoming body as Will's orgasm crashes into him like a wave.

By the time Hannibal removes his finger and presses Will's face against his shoulder, Will is nearly asleep, his body completely lax. The front of his trousers is wet and warm. Hannibal rubs against the damp material, then lifts his hand to his mouth, sucking the remains of Will's seed from his fingertips.

"Wanna taste you too," Will slurs. He shuffles backwards, wincing, then drops to his knees in front of Hannibal. His legs all but disappear in the thick white carpet, only the tops of his thighs still visible above the fluffy fabric.

"Who am I to deny such a sweet boy?" Hannibal coos. He unzips the front of his slacks. The sound of the zipper is loud in the quiet cabin, the rectangular head catching over each and every metal tooth before coming to a halt at the base. Hannibal reaches into his silk boxers and draws out his throbbing cock, running a hand along the bottom. The vein on the underside of his shaft surges with a sudden rush of blood, and Hannibal watches Will's eyes turn from dark blue to black, pupil expanding to totally eclipse everything but a thin ring of cerulean.

Will licks his lips before slowly leaning forward. His eyes never leave Hannibal's cock as he runs the tip of his pink tongue from the base of Hannibal's sac to the top of his slit. Will's tongue pokes inside the opening, lapping up the precum collecting there.

"How do I taste?" Hannibal asks.

Will's eyes are half-lidded, hazy with lust as he answers, "So fucking good."

Hannibal cannot correct Will's language, too busy resisting the urge to choke Will on his cock as Will swallows him down. He hits the back of Will's throat, and Will refuses to slow, shoving Hannibal's shaft further inside until his nose is buried in Hannibal's pubic hair.

"Perfect," Hannibal moans, grinding the head of his cock against Will's esophagus. "Such a good boy for me."

Will whines, and the vibrations from the sound travel up Hannibal's shaft and land in his pelvis. Will's mouth is molten lava, wet and hot and every good thing. Hannibal uses one hand to grab tightly onto Will's hair, then uses the other to press against the outside of Will's throat. He can *feel* his cock through the thin skin. Feel the bulge of Will's throat as it is split open for Hannibal.

Will reaches down with slim, sure fingers and begins to play with Hannibal's sac. His soft fingertips massage the tender flesh. Hannibal groans at the feel, at how tiny Will's hands are in comparison with Hannibal's balls. Will's other hand lands on Hannibal's thigh, trembling fingers clutching at the fabric as the boy continues to split himself on Hannibal's length.

Saliva drips from the corners of Will's lips. He chokes, tears flooding down his cheeks. When he swallows, his throat contracts around Hannibal (sucking him even further down). Hannibal comes with a quiet sigh, flooding Will's throat and spilling into the boy's stomach.

Will stays on Hannibal's cock, suckling the tip until it slips from his wet mouth. Hannibal shivers as cool air rushes around his soft, saliva-covered shaft. He leans forward and picks Will up, the boy limp and docile in his arms. Hannibal presses Will against his shoulder, encouraging him to breathe in the scent of Hannibal, to relax into the warmth and protection that Hannibal provides.

Will falls asleep. Hannibal smiles and carries him to the bed. He draws the ridiculously gaudy golden curtain closed, a veil of protection. In the bathroom, Hannibal grabs a washcloth and dampens it, bringing it back to clean Will off, removing the boy's soaked undergarments and trousers and replacing them with a fresh pair from their luggage.

Will stays asleep for the rest of their flight. Hannibal sits next to him on the bed, content to watch the steady rise and fall of Will's shoulders as he rests. Hannibal wishes he could peel back Will's skull, see the dreams that map the boy's mind, dive into each and every thought that crosses the complex neural network of Will's brain.

Alas, such a thing is not to be. Hannibal allows himself instead to pet Will's curls and enjoy the way Will nuzzles closer to Hannibal, seeking him out even in sleep.

Will jerks awake when the plane lands, the sudden jolt of tires against pavement enough to bring Will back to awareness.

"We've arrived," Hannibal says, unnecessarily, and the unamused look Will gives him could quell a lesser man.

Hannibal is not a lesser man.

The steps are lowered, and Hannibal guides Will out of the plane and onto the tarmac. Cool wind blows across their stale faces, the sun a distant thing as it hides behind puffy, white clouds. In the distance, the sound of car horns and rattling trains echo across the cement and asphalt. Hannibal breathes in the smell of pollution, noting the faintest hint of salt, of seawater. Even this small trace is enough to cause his blood race beneath his skin.

"Where are we?" Will murmurs, rubbing a hand over his eyes. His voice is deep and gravely from disuse (from being impaled on Hannibal's cock).

"About thirty minutes outside of Rome, Italy," Hannibal says. He fights to tamp down the swell of arousal that floods his veins at the sound of Will's well-abused throat. "Our journey is not yet complete."

Will slumps against Hannibal, one arm hanging limply at his side, the other clutching at Hannibal's suit, wrinkling the fabric. Hannibal smiles at the outward sign of possession, and he rests his own hand atop Will's, encouraging him to grab harder (to love Hannibal *more*).

Will had not asked where they would be going when Hannibal suggested a trip. The boy had merely shrugged, exhausted, and then snuggled further into Hannibal's side. Hannibal wonders, now, if Will is as excited to be shown Italy as Hannibal is to show it to him.

"Are we staying in Rome?" Will asks. He seems to perk up at the mention of their destination. "I read about the Trevi Fountain in one of the books you left me to learn Italian. I don't think I understood most of it. *Il mio italiano non è ancora molto buono.* But the pictures you drew…" Will looks up at Hannibal, and it's as if all the stars have fallen from the universe and landed in the boy's eyes. "Your drawings were *beautiful*."

Hannibal feels something foreign rise in his throat. His cheeks color a light pink. He is… bashful. This sweet, perfect boy in front of him has evoked an emotion inside of Hannibal as foreign to him as the planets of a distant galaxy.

Hannibal clears his throat, straightens the lapels on his plaid suit. "We will certainly make time to see the fountain. Whatever you wish, darling, it is yours. You simply have to ask"

Will beams and squeezes tighter to Hannibal's suit. "Okay. How about we start with some pizza?"

Hannibal huffs. Rolls his eyes.

He cannot stop smiling.

There's a car waiting for them further down the tarmac. The chauffeur opens the door for Hannibal. Hannibal waits for Will to slide in first (amused once again at the look of agony that crosses Will's face when his tender bottom rests against the supple leather seats), then climbs in after.

The hotel Hannibal reserved for their stay is a ten-minute walk from the Trevi Fountain. Hannibal is proud of how well he anticipated his boy's needs (at how well he takes care of Will and how well Will, in turn, takes care of him). Though there were many options to choose from in Rome, Hannibal managed to book one of the most exclusive places for their accommodations. Only the best for his boy, after all.

"When was the last time you visited Italy?" Will asks, head tucked against Hannibal's shoulder just as he had on the plane.

Hannibal hums. Tilts his head. "Shall we play our game? A question for a question?"

Will glares at Hannibal but nods his consent.

"You spoil me," Hannibal says. A pause, then, "The last time I was in Italy was about three years ago. It was rare I had long periods of time available for a vacation; the life of a surgeon is not conducive for travel, I'm afraid. Still, I had worked long enough at Johns Hopkins for my time-off to accumulate. I decided to treat myself to a two-week trip along the Italian coast."

“Three years seems like such a long time. I know how much you love it here. You draw Italy more than any other place.”

Hannibal is, once again, in awe of how well Will sees him. He wonders if there is anything he can hide from Will, any part of him that he can truly keep hidden.

He wonders if he wants to hide at all, now that he has been seen (has been loved).

The answer is no.

“Your turn,” Will mumbles, face shoved into the lapels of Hannibal’s suit.

Hannibal looks out the window, at the hundreds of people walking along the paved sidewalks and narrow roads. Thousand-year-old churches and crumbling walls pass in the blink of an eye. His body relaxes into the leather seat. Italy has always held such a special place in his heart. The company he shares now only enhances the country’s beauty.

“I want you to tell me about our driver,” Hannibal says. “What can you see? It has been some time since our last empathy lesson.”

Will snorts, lifts his head from Hannibal’s shoulder. “If you’re sure. It won’t be much; my empathy is always most effective when I can see their eyes.”

Hannibal gestures to the rearview mirror through the glass partition separating the front of the car from the back. “Perhaps when she looks into the mirror.”

Will pinches the bridge of his nose, squares his shoulders, then stares at the mirror with an unnerving intensity. When the driver looks back to make a turn, Will’s eyes go hazy for a brief moment. Words fall from his mouth like stones tumbling down a deep well.

“She’s…nervous. Look at the way her fingers clench the steering wheel. This is her first time on the job. Can’t mess it up. Someone is relying on her. Her mother? No, a sibling. She needs this money.” The driver, completely oblivious to the dissection of her private life occurring in the backseat, looks in the rearview mirror once more, brown eyes flashing across the glass for only a brief moment before facing forward.

“What else,” Hannibal murmurs, entranced.

“She’s…hopeful. Saw how nicely you were dressed. How you let me sit in the car first. She hopes you will give her a generous tip.”

Will blinks, and whatever spell his empathy had placed over him is broken.

“Brilliant,” Hannibal breathes. “Utterly brilliant.”

Will flushes, squirms. His pupils dilate further in the low light of the car. His scent flushes with pride (with arousal). “Thanks. Uh, I guess that means it’s my turn now.”

“It is.”

“What is your favorite place in Italy?”

“A relatively easy question, all things considered. Though Italy holds many beautiful things, all of them pale in comparison to the Norman Chapel in Palermo.” Hannibal pauses, wondering how much to reveal.

Will immediately picks up on Hannibal’s hesitance and makes an inquisitive noise.

“The chapel is…part of me. Inside. The walls of my Mind Palace take on the shape of its corridors and rooms.” Hannibal turns to face Will, unwilling to look away for even a moment. “Though I must admit that more and more, the rooms are filled with you.”

Will opens his mouth, but before he can speak, their car pulls against a concrete curb and parks. The chauffeur gets out and opens the door closest to the sidewalk, gesturing for Will to step outside. He does, legs trembling, and Hannibal follows closely behind.

The noise outside is near overwhelming after the quiet intimacy of the car.

Hannibal, while never rude, still tips more than he typically would. His hands are sure and steady as he gives the chauffeur an obscenely thick wad of cash. He listens to her sharp intake of breath without glancing in her direction.

Their hotel is an austere building with white stone walls and arched windows that spill light out onto the busy street below. It costs as much to spend one night at the hotel as some people spend on a new car.

Hannibal could care less.

He only has eyes for his boy.

Will’s eyes dilate from the attention. He licks his lips, then tilts his head back to reveal the bruised skin of his neck. The collar of his shirt had been covering the marks left from Hannibal’s passion, but the shift in Will’s stance shows off the marks now, the color of them lush in the bright light of the sun. Hannibal swallows the growl building in his throat and steps forward, grabbing Will’s hand in a too-tight grip and practically dragging the boy inside the ornate foyer of the hotel.

Hannibal’s Italian is rapid-fire as he asks for the key to their room. The concierge working the front desk attempts to make small talk, recommending local venues and restaurants, but Hannibal is aching to go upstairs and be alone with his beloved. He knows the area they are staying in like he knows the freckles dotting Will’s skin. Hannibal quickly thanks the concierge for their (admittedly bland and underwhelming) suggestions before finding the nearest elevator. The elevator doors close just as Hannibal sees their chauffeur bringing in their luggage.

The room they are staying in lies on the top floor of the hotel. It is tastefully decorated with beige carpet, maroon duvets, and large windows that look out on the street. Their suite also includes access to a rooftop terrace that Hannibal is eager to use (more specifically, the

private heated pool that Hannibal can already imagine taking Will apart in as they listen to the chiming bells of the nearby *San Paolo dentro le Mura*).

“I believe I promised you a pizza,” Hannibal teases once their luggage is safely delivered to the room. It’s late afternoon, the sunlight waning as it tilts towards the horizon. Hannibal stretches his neck and mentally sorts through a list of restaurants suitable to serve him and his boy.

“I can’t believe you actually agreed to that,” Will snorts. “I thought eating pizza would be below your standard of living.”

Hannibal purses his lips. “Pizza is a perfectly adequate food when prepared properly. People have been eating it for thousands of years. The ancient Romans served focaccia bread with sea salt and olive oil. This simple recipe evolved into pizza as we currently know it when tomatoes were introduced from the Americas.”

“Oh my *god*, I asked for pizza, not a history lesson.”

Will’s protests are, of course, complete nonsense. The boy’s eyes shine with mirth, and Hannibal knows that each and every word spoken between them has been stored in the boy’s marvelous brain, an uncracked vault of knowledge that grows more and more filled by the day.

In the end, Hannibal leads Will to a restaurant across the street from the Trevi Fountain. It serves a variety of authentic Italian dishes (including pizza), and Hannibal is enamored with the way Will’s American accent trips and stumbles over the pronunciation of the item he selects from the menu. Though Will’s empathy gives him an exceptional ability to mimic the languages and voices he hears, he has never heard these particular words before (the foods listed on the menu far too niche to be included in any dictionary or grammar sheet that Hannibal has provided before), so his pronunciation is hesitant as his pink tongue twists and turns over the words.

Their waiter is less than enamored with Will’s attempt. He sneers at Will’s accent, nose raised in the air, and tells Will rather loudly, “I speak English. Why don’t you try that, instead?”

Will’s cheeks turn crimson, and his scent burns with embarrassment. He ducks his head, chin tucked into his neck, and meekly points at the menu to indicate what he wants to order instead of speaking again.

Hannibal is irate. His anger, usually a slow, deadly thing (not unlike a rising fog of poison that quietly fills his victims with a false sense of security while at the same time clogging their lungs until they expire) is now more akin to a billowing flame. It burns Hannibal’s throat, clogs his ears, causes his eyes to bleed and his nails to catch on the soft fabric of his pants.

“Hannibal,” Will says. Quiet.

Hannibal immediately looks away from the wandering waiter (a man who has no idea just how close to death he is, how easily his mortality is tempted when dangled in front of

Hannibal's fangs) and down at his darling.

"Yes, Will?" Hannibal asks.

"I'm fine. It's fine." Will reaches up and lays his hand on top of Hannibal's, their fingers entwining next to a carafe of sweating water. "My accent was really bad."

"Your accent was lovely, as is every sound that leaves your mouth." Hannibal glares at the waiter's retreating back, then mutters, "Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you."

"I think it's you doing the rending in this situation, not the swine."

Hannibal turns back to Will and grins at his boy. "Yes, I suppose the scripture did get that part wrong."

Will giggles, and all the tension drains from Hannibal's body. Now is not the time for anger. Later, though (when Will is asleep, tucked into bed for the night, lashes fluttering with endless dreams), perhaps later there will be time for anger.

"Does god often get things wrong?"

"He must. Otherwise, he would have given you to me at the moment of your birth, not a second later. You have been mine since the time you first drew breath, though you and I were not aware. The possession was there, whether we knew it or not."

Will sinks against the back of his wrought-iron chair, scent turning from embarrassment to pleasure. "Does that mean you were mine, too? Even before I was born?"

"Of course," Hannibal says. Solemn. A vow. "We have lived a thousand lives together before this one, and we will meet each other again in the next. The two of us are intertwined. Inseparable. Not even god would be foolish enough to render us asunder."

They both smile at each other, hands still held tightly together. A soft wind blows. It smells of braised meat and fresh sweat and the slight acidic tang of flowing water, courtesy of the flowing fountain nearby.

When they finish eating, Hannibal asks the waiter for his business card. "I enjoy hosting dinner parties," he tells the man. "Do you cater? I would love to have you for dinner."

Will keeps his laughter inside, but Hannibal can feel the boy's amusement bubbling up beneath the surface of his skin like a hidden spring flowing to the surface of a deep lake.

They walk, hand in hand, across the street to the Trevi Fountain. Will's gasp of pleasure is caught in Hannibal's ears. He saves the sound and places it inside his Mind Palace. It echoes inside the walls of the Norman Chapel, an angelic chorus for Hannibal's ears alone.

"What do you think?" Hannibal asks. He stands at the side of the fountain, eyes focused on Will. Nothing is more beautiful than his boy, not even the familiar splendor of carved stone

and flowing water.

Will turns to him, eyes the same deep teal as the water. Tears glisten beneath his lids. When Will tilts his head to look up at Hannibal, the sunlight glances off the unshed tears, and a rainbow reflects across Will's lashes, the Greek goddess Iris made flesh in Will's form.

"It's perfect," Will says. "Just like your drawing."

"Perfect," Hannibal agrees, eyes never straying from Will.

They stand at the edge of the fountain for an indeterminable amount of time. The sun slowly sets, orange and pink splaying across the water. The crowds around them churn and shift, the world spins, and Will and Hannibal remain exactly as they are.

When Will begins to shiver, Hannibal forces the boy to leave. Will's gaze is a fond farewell as they walk away. Hannibal rests his broad palm against the base of Will's back, encouraging Will forward as they make their way back to the hotel.

That night, they make achingly slow love inside of the heated pool. Will rides Hannibal, arms wrapped around Hannibal's neck, the boy's breath warm and moist as it blows across Hannibal's chin. Will's hips grind down, barely rising up before dropping down again and again. The water swirls around them, bubbling and hot, and Hannibal groans before spilling inside of Will, watching with sadness as his seed is washed away by the churning waves rather than staying inside of Will (where it belongs).

Will is an absolute delight to travel with (though Hannibal possessed no doubts about such a thing before they left). His wide-eyed wonder never leaves, no matter how many places they go, how many foods they try, how many people they meet. Will is almost unbearably innocent in his admiration and amazement. Hannibal wants to sully his ivory skin, cover him in blood, wrap Will up inside of his arms and never let him go.

"I'm going to miss it," Will says, wistful, as they climb into their car. They are headed for the train station. Their next stop is Naples, then on to Palermo. Though Hannibal prefers the solitude and privacy of a car, he has to admit that the best way to experience the Italian countryside is by train ride.

He also has a very specific idea of how to keep Will occupied during their journey.

The chauffeur drops them off at the train station thirty minutes before their departure time. Hannibal wheels their luggage over to one of the attendants, then guides Will to their first-class seats.

"Have you ever ridden on a train before?" Hannibal asks, sliding into one of plush leather chairs.

Will gives him an unimpressed look. "What do you think?"

Hannibal hums, amused. "There are trains in Louisiana too, darling. The question is not completely without merit."

“Beside my dad’s trailer and a couple of buses, I usually just walked everywhere I needed to go. And I really didn’t need to go anywhere.”

Hannibal closes his eyes, swallows the anger that rises in him once more. “I wish your father were still alive. I would make his suffering endless for you, darling. Peel the skin from his muscle, peel the muscle from bone. Pluck his useless eyes from his skull. Cut the merciless tongue from his mouth. I would break his feet, force him to crawl to you, beg for mercy with blood pouring from his bruised lips. And you would show him none.”

Will shivers.

There is nothing but the smell of spiced arousal in his scent.

With a growl, Hannibal suddenly stands. He takes Will’s hand in his own and practically drags the boy down to the bathroom. Once inside, Hannibal locks the door and turns Will so that he is facing the vanity, both of his hands placed on the marble countertop to steady his unbalanced torso.

“What—”

Will’s words are cut off as Hannibal reaches around and unbuckles the boy’s trousers. Will’s small cock perks up, brushing against Hannibal’s hand as he slowly pulls down Will’s pants and boxers. The boy’s pale, pert bottom is now completely exposed, flesh nearly translucent from the brightness of the vanity lights. Purple veins crisscross the delicate skin, winding and weaving between the leftover bruises from Will’s spanking (though they are nearly gone now, and Hannibal looks forward to the day he can replace his marks on Will’s precious skin).

Hannibal removes a small tube of lubricant from his pocket and slicks up two of his fingers. He trails them down Will’s crease, admiring the pink-stained skin, before shoving both fingers inside of Will’s rim at the same time.

Will moans, arches his back. In the mirror, Hannibal can see Will’s eyes go heavy-lidded with lust. Can see the way his shirt shifts to reveal the bite marks and bruises littering the ivory column of his neck.

“Do you trust me?” Hannibal asks. He twists his fingers, brushing them against Will’s prostate.

“Yes,” Will moans, pushing back against Hannibal’s fingertips. “I trust you.”

Hannibal grins, all teeth, and removes his fingers. He pulls up Will’s boxers and zips up the front of his trousers. “Good boy. Now do exactly as I say.”

Will is shaking as he leaves the bathroom. The train hasn’t started moving yet, but Will still sways as he walks down the narrow car, legs trembling with each step. Arousal and fear bloom beneath his skin like thorny vines, pricking his heart until Will feels he is bleeding out with every step forward.

His hole is wet and slightly gaping from Hannibal's hurried preparations. And what Hannibal had asked Will to do, what Hannibal wants to *do* to Will…

Blushing, Will stumbles into the car where he and Hannibal will be sitting. Hannibal is already there, perfectly polished in his navy plaid suit and brown leather oxfords. He looks up at Will with mock surprise.

"Ah, darling, come sit with me."

Will flushes a darker shade of crimson at those words. There is no one else in the car yet, but Will is still furiously embarrassed (and ridiculously turned-on) about what is going to happen next.

Taking a deep breath, Will walks over to Hannibal and sits on the man's lap. Hannibal's firm thighs part beneath Will's bottom. Will can easily feel Hannibal's throbbing erection beneath him, hot and solid and impossible to ignore.

Hannibal hums, buries his nose in the nape of Will's neck. He reaches for the jacket of his suit and lays it on top of Will's lap, covering the two of them as if it were a blanket. Though there is a table in-between them and the seats facing their own, the jacket adds another layer of protection (a mockery of modesty).

With trembling hands, Will reaches down and slides off his pants and boxers so that they are bunched around his knees, exposing his bare hole for Hannibal. Hannibal smiles against Will's neck and takes out his cock, sliding into Will with one smooth, firm thrust.

Will mewls. He can't help it, can't control the sound as it tumbles from his lips. Hannibal shushes him, pets the base of his neck as if he were an animal in need of taming.

Hannibal is so *hot* inside of Will, the head of his thick cock pressing insistently against Will's prostate no matter which way he turns. Will can *feel* the veins pulsing in Hannibal's shaft, can feel the precum leaking out and spilling inside of him. Will feels split open, vulnerable, pulled apart in every sense of the word. He just hopes Hannibal is there to pick up the pieces of him when he inevitably shatters.

There's a soft *whooshing* sound, and the doors of the train car open. A couple walks down the aisle, stopping at the seats facing Hannibal and Will. The man is wearing a bespoke suit similar to Hannibal's (though Hannibal pulls off the slim, tailored style in a far superior way). The woman is wearing linen trousers and a modest white blouse, both cut to fit to her lean limbs and small bosom.

The couple is all friendly smiles as they see Hannibal and Will. They eye the way Will is clutching Hannibal's hand (knuckles white, fingertips gripping hard enough to leave bruises) with faint amusement and pity.

Will is sure his face is a livid shade of purple right now.

"*Ciao*," the man says, tilting his head in greeting at Hannibal (and, inadvertently, at Will, who is currently impaled on Hannibal's cock).

“*Ciao*,” Hannibal replies.

Though Will’s grasp of the language is remedial at best, he can still tell that Hannibal’s accent is flawless. No one who heard the man speak would think he was anything but a native Italian speaker (a fact Hannibal clearly takes great pride in if the way his pleased purr rumbles through his chest is anything to go by).

The husband and wife sit down, once more looking at the way Will is perched on Hannibal’s lap with fond amusement.

“*Primo viaggio in treno*?” the man asks.

Just then, the train starts to move. It pulls away from the station with a sudden jolt. Will feels Hannibal’s cock all the way inside of his stomach. A small whimper escapes his lips, Will helpless to keep it bottled inside.

The man grins and crosses one knee over the other. For the next ten minutes, the three adults share pleasant chatter, speaking only of trivial things like the weather and future plans for travel. The train rocks on its tracks, and Will prays for a quick death. Or even a slow one. Anything to keep away the endless, molten pleasure that is flowing through every vein in his body each time Hannibal’s cock grinds against his prostate.

“Are you doing all right?” Hannibal asks. His breath blows warm and hot against the shell of Will’s ear.

Will shivers, breathing in the scent of Hannibal’s woodsy cologne (the musk of Hannibal’s skin beneath it, the combination of the two scents so intoxicating that Will thinks he never wants to breathe air that isn’t infused with the smell), then shivers again.

“I’m fine,” he whispers. “Just fine.”

“Ah, Americans!” the man says, obviously delighted. “Your accent is very good, *signore*. Does your son know Italian, too?”

Hannibal wraps a possessive arm around Will’s waist, drawing Will further back into Hannibal's torso. Will can feel the heat of Hannibal's skin even through the ridiculous layers of the man’s suit. It calms Will, the familiar warmth a balm soothing the burning ache buried into every cell of his body.

“He does,” Hannibal says. “This is his first trip to Italy. There is no finer way to experience the countryside than by train, no?”

An enthusiastic response from both the man and woman.

The train suddenly slows.

Will bites his bottom lip hard enough to bleed.

He can still hear Hannibal’s throaty whisper in the bathroom; it seems like hours ago when they’d had the conversation, though it is probably closer to thirty minutes.

“I want you to keep me warm during our journey, darling. Do you think you can do that for me?”

Will was, as always, helpless to refuse.

“Won’t someone see?” Will had asked (begged).

“They will see only what we wish them to see: a father comforting his son.”

Hannibal’s thick fingers had not stopped moving the entire time the two of them had spoken. Each flick of the man’s wrist, each brush of his fingertips against Will’s prostate had destroyed any argument Will could think of at the time.

“Don’t you trust me?”

The train gives another jolt. Will sees stars.

Damn Hannibal! Damn the man to hell and back. Damn his implacable calm, the cool facade of concern on his face. Damn his ridiculously huge cock. Damn the way it fits inside of Will so nicely, soothes the ache inside of him that never truly leaves unless Hannibal is there to fill it.

Will has always been shy in public. The few times he went with his father to the dollar store or junkyard, Will had always kept his eyes firmly glued to the ground, unwilling to read the expressions of every person he passed. It was exhausting. So many emotions, so many thoughts, so many things swirling in the air just waiting to be breathed into Will’s lungs like a sickness. School was no better, the emotions of children so sharp that it felt like being stabbed with an endless array of rusty knives each time Will tried to communicate with his peers.

Hannibal has removed that fear, removed that crippling shyness. He’s replaced it with aching lust. Replaced it with broad palms gripping Will’s trim waist. Replaced it with his shaft buried deep inside of Will, a place carved out of Will for Hannibal and Hannibal alone.

Sweat beads along Will’s temples. He shifts in Hannibal’s lap, attempting to nudge the head of Hannibal’s cock away from his throbbing prostate.

It’s no use, of course. No matter which way Will moves, the pleasure is endless, excruciating in its mild burn, a fire with an unending supply of fuel. Will attempts to distract himself by staring out of the window. It truly is a lovely sight; even in the middle of winter, the Italian countryside is full of endless stone buildings, copses of palm trees, and the occasional glimpse of the sea.

None of it seems to register in his mind.

A drop of sweat trickles from Will’s forehead to his neck. It tickles his delicate skin, and Will clenches on reflex, another moan threatening to tumble from his lips as Hannibal’s cock throbs inside of him. Will can feel a burst of heat spilling deep inside of him as more precum releases from the slit of Hannibal’s shaft.

Hannibal hums behind Will, runs mockingly soothing hands along Will's side. He leans over Will's shoulder with the pretext of pointing out a particular landmark passing by the train. His tongue slides along Will's neck, lapping up the beading sweat with a quick, efficient lick. One minute he's pressed against Will's neck, the next he is leaning back into the chair, voice calm as he asks the couple across from them about the town they are from.

Will trembles. He writhes. The couple across from them give Will pitying looks, mistaking his ecstasy for agony (though, Will supposes, the two are not entirely separate in his case).

When the train finally pulls to a stop in Naples, Will thinks he might pass out. His legs tremble beneath the table, shaking with the effort not to grind back against Hannibal's erection, not to finally tip over the cliff of pleasure that has been calling to Will like a forbidden siren since the moment Hannibal slid inside of him hours ago.

"The next ride will be easier," the woman coos as she stands. "The first time can be hard. You are a brave boy."

Will would be annoyed at her condescending tone if he wasn't urgently staving off his own orgasm. Instead of responding with words (Will is sure that, if he were to open his mouth, all that would come out is a pitiful moan), he merely nods his head in thanks.

"*Spero ti piaccia il tuo viaggio*!" the man chirps. Together, the couple exit the train car and leave Hannibal and Will.

Alone.

"*Will*," Hannibal growls. He sounds positively feral. Will squeaks, rolls his hips slightly up and down. They both groan at the pleasure this movement causes.

"Please," Will begs, though for what he isn't sure. For mercy? For release? For anything other than this endless purgatory of pleasure?

"I have you, love. So good for me. Such a good boy."

Hannibal lifts Will off his cock, and Will instantly feels so empty. He's certainly felt empty before when Hannibal has left his body (just as he now leaves Will's hole, gaping and trembling with nothing to keep it open). But never before has Will felt an emptiness like this. It consumes him, leaves him aching for something, *anything* to fill him up. There's no seed to keep him satisfied, no remnants of Hannibal left inside to ease the transition from full to empty.

There's just nothing.

And Will hates it.

"Please," Will whines again.

Hannibal shushes him. He zips up his slacks, then pulls Will's boxers and pants over his (empty) hole. Hannibal picks up his suit jacket from off of Will's lap and puts it back on.

Hannibal lifts up Will (who feels his trembling legs might not carry him more than a few shaky steps) before standing himself. He leads Will, not to the exit, but to the bathroom.

As soon as they are inside, the door is locked and Will is being bent over the countertop almost immediately.

Will's mind feels warm and hazy as Hannibal removes his boxers and pants once more, this time pulling them all the way off so that he has complete access to Will's body. Hannibal barely unzips his trousers before he is taking out his leaking cock and slamming it into Will's gaping hole.

"*Yes*," Will gasps. "Yes, oh, *just* like that."

Hannibal's movements are frantic. This is no tender lovemaking. This is sex, raw and pure and brutal in its intensity. Hannibal slams his cock into Will over and over again, each thrust pressing Will further into the cool marble countertop. The hard edge of the vanity bites into Will's chest, provides a mild source of pain to counteract the burning pleasure that fills every nerve in his body as Hannibal takes him hard and fast.

The sound of their fucking is loud in the small bathroom. The filthy wet noises echo off tile and marble alike. Each slick thrust of Hannibal inside of Will's hole is accompanied by a high-pitched wail from Will and a low, throaty groan from Hannibal.

"My good boy," Hannibal growls. He reaches around to grasp Will's chin from behind. He tilts Will's head up so that their eyes meet in the vanity mirror.

Will gasps at the sight. His eyes are blown, pupils eclipsing the blue until it is nothing but a faint rim, a memory. His lips are red and swollen from being pressed against his teeth (pressed against the moans threatening to spill from his mouth like slick oil) for the past two hours of their train ride. The front of his shirt is wrinkled against the countertop, and Will can make out the faint protrusion of his pert nipples as they rub against the fabric. Each time Hannibal slams into him, they grow increasingly more sensitive, until it is nearly painful to feel his shirt rub against the perky nubs.

Hannibal, though…Hannibal looks positively *feral*. Sweat drips from his temples and streaks across his chiseled cheekbones. His eyes are also black, no maroon left to be found. His pale lips are pulled back into a wordless snarl, his long incisors visible as he grips Will's hair and tugs it back.

"Look at you," he groans, hips giving a particularly deep thrust. Will shakes as the head of Hannibal's swollen cock grinds against his abused prostate. "Mine. All mine. Anyone who sees you will know that you are taken. Owned."

Will nods, though the movement is small and stilted due to Hannibal's grip at the nape of his neck. Will is past the point of words, only able to utter punched-out moans as Hannibal slams into him with enough force to rattle his teeth.

"Oh, *oh*!" Will keens. He closes his eyes as his orgasm hits him, the most powerful one he's ever felt before. It strikes his body like a bolt of lightning. Fire flashes behind his closed eyes,

burning a trail down his spine and straight into his cock. He spills across the cabinets, streak after streak of cum painting the dark wood in stripes of wipe.

Will's hole clenches around Hannibal's still-thrusting cock, and Hannibal spills inside of Will with a pained moan. He continues grinding into Will even after his orgasm has receded, pushing his seed so deep into Will that Will swears he can feel it in his stomach.

As soon as Hannibal slips out of him, Will collapses against the floor, his legs unable to hold him up for another minute.

"Darling," Hannibal coos. He immediately drops to his knees and draws Will's trembling body into his lap. They sit like that for a moment, simply holding one another, Will's arms wrapped tightly around Hannibal's neck as if to let him go would mean death.

Hannibal's seed spills lazily from Will's rim. It slides, sticky and warm, down the backs of his thighs, soaking into the bunched-up fabric of his boxers.

"Thank you," Hannibal whispers. His fingers brush back a handful of Will's sweaty curls, tucking them gently behind Will's ear. "I love you. I love you so much it *hurts*."

"I know," Will whispers back. "I know. Me too."

Hannibal rises, carrying Will up and depositing him on top of the counter. The cool marble is like a balm against Will's burning thighs. He sighs at the contact and leans back until his spine is resting against the mirror. Will watches with heavy-lidded eyes as Hannibal cleans up both of their spilled seed with a wad of toilet paper. When the cabinets and Will's legs are (mostly) clean, Hannibal pulls up Will's boxers and pants. Will grimaces at the feel of the sticky, moist fabric.

"My apologies," Hannibal says. He presses a kiss to Will's sweat-slick temple. "We can change as soon as we exit the train. Our luggage should be close by."

Will sighs, allows himself to slump forward so that his forehead is resting against Hannibal's broad shoulder. "I think you fucked all the muscles from my legs."

"Language," Hannibal chides, though there is no heat to his reprimand, only a gentle fondness that causes Will to ache inside of his heart (to ache as much as his body now aches).

They eventually manage to leave the bathroom. Will is grateful for the empty aisles of the train; though having the couple across from him and Hannibal during the journey had been unbearably hot (knowing he was impaled on Hannibal's cock while the couple remained completely oblivious to the depravity happening right in front of them), Will is tired and worn and wants nothing more than to collapse into the nearest bed, preferably after a very thorough shower.

Will is half-asleep by the time their chauffeur drops them off at their hotel where they will be staying for the next few days. Hannibal is infinitely gentle as he guides Will into the elevator and down the hall to their room. They shower together, exchanging lazy kisses and even

lazier words of adoration. By the time they collapse into bed, neither cares that it is the middle of the day, sleep the only thing on either of their minds.

They wake after the sun has set. Will opens his bleary eyes to find Hannibal already awake and staring at him. Hannibal's face is soft in the dim light. His dark hair is mussed, spilling over his flawless skin like ink spilling over a blank page. Will raises a tired hand to sweep it away, relishing the warmth of Hannibal's skin beneath his hand.

"Good morning," Will jokes.

Hannibal grins, pale lips pulling back to reveal his crooked teeth.

Will's heart skips a beat.

"I believe it is a good evening," Hannibal muses. "A very good evening. Are you quite sore?"

Will rolls his eyes and forces himself to sit up, propping himself against the ridiculously oversized headboard. "I am. Exactly, I am sure, as you intended."

"You know me so well, darling."

"I do, *mon coeur*."

Hannibal's eyes widen, the whites of his eyes flashing in the darkness. Will immediately flushes and bites down on his bottom lip.

"What did you say?" Hannibal rasps.

Will tugs on his earlobe, scrunches his toes so that they are curled up inside of his socks. "I… it's just…well, you have so many sweet names for me. Darling. Mylimasis. Beloved." Will flushes and glances down at the beige comforter. "I just feel you deserve a special name, too."

Hannibal's hands appear on the edges of Will's vision. They cup his face, force him to look up into Hannibal's eyes. Eyes which are wet and glistening with unshed tears.

"Oh, *darling*," Hannibal says. "I am honored to be called such a thing by you. To be granted access to your heart, to hear those words fall from your lips…it is a gift that I will hold and treasure for the rest of my life."

Will's mouth splits into a wide grin. He leans over and plants a kiss to Hannibal's utterly irresistible lips. When he leans back, a deep ache settles over his body, a soreness that can only come from hours spent as Hannibal's personal cock warmer.

Hannibal notices the look of pain on Will's face, and his smile only widens in response.

Will huffs and gets up from the bed, wincing with each and every step he takes to the bathroom.

They change into fresh clothing (clothes that don't reek of sweat and sex), and find a nearby restaurant with a high enough rating for Hannibal's scrupulous tastes. The menu is practically gibberish to Will, but this time their waiter is a kindly older gentleman who delights in helping Will perfect his pronunciation rather than mocking him for his accent.

Hannibal beams when Will finishes ordering, and Will can't help but smile back, high off of the pride (the love) radiating from the older man.

After dinner, they wander the streets hand in hand. No one gives them a second glance. No one looks at Will as if he is lesser (as if he doesn't belong). Will isn't worried that he will be chased away with a raised fist and a shouted curse. With Hannibal, Will belongs. With Hannibal, Will is safe.

With Hannibal, Will is loved.

They stay out well into the night. The moon trails across the sky. The streetlamps turn on, casting a warm glow across the cobblestone roads and narrow sidewalks. In the distance, the sound of laughter and music spills from open bars and late-night clubs. The air smells like seawater and beer, an interesting combination but one that Will finds he rather enjoys.

They return to their hotel room early in the morning. Will hums a nameless tune as they take the elevator upstairs (to the top floor, because Hannibal has far too much money and is determined to spend every penny of it on Will). Despite his long afternoon nap, Will is more than ready to slip beneath the covers and fall asleep.

Will isn't sure if it is from the exhaustion of the train ride or the unfamiliarity of yet another foreign bed, but that night, for the first time in weeks, Will has a nightmare.

His father is mad. Will isn't sure why. His empathy, usually so succinct at sussing out the meaning behind any emotion, is failing him this time (this one time, when his life depends on finding out exactly what caused his father's anger and swiftly correcting the problem.

"Will," the man growls. He looms over Will, tall and broad and powerful. His hands are covered in rust. No, blood. It drips from the man's dirty fingertips and falls to the floor with soft sounds, not unlike that of gently falling rain.

"Please," Will begs.

His pleas fall on deaf ears.

With a roar, the man lifts his blood-soaked hands and brings them down onto Will's ribs. There's a loud crack, thunder to match the sound of falling rain. Will gasps, chokes, tries to scream. The pain is so intense he fears he might pass out.

"Will," his father says. His eyes turn black. Antlers erupt from his head, towering and spindly like branches of a burnt tree. His skin becomes like tar, his tongue long and forked as it pokes out from his black lips."Will."

"Will. *Will*. My love, can you hear me? It is only a dream. A dream, darling."

Will opens his eyes with a cry, startled out of his nightmare. His entire body is trembling and covered in sweat. Hannibal is propped up next to him, a look of concern etched into every fiber of his face.

“Sorry,” Will sobs. “I’m sorry. Please…”

Hannibal hushes him. Wipes away his tears. Sucks the collected moisture from his fingertips, then strokes away Will’s sodden curls.

“Will you…” Will clears his throat, his voice like gravel. His nose is stuffed, and Hannibal grabs a tissue from the nightstand and helps him to blow it. “Will you talk to me? I need you…I need your voice. Please.”

“Anything,” Hannibal vows. He clears his throat, too, then begins to speak in a melodious tone. “When I was a child, I kept a cochlear garden. I fattened snails on herbs and vine leaves. Mischa…Mischa liked to name them. She assured me she could tell each snail apart, no matter how similar they looked. They all appeared the same to me.”

“What did she name them?” Will whispers.

“Whatever name appeared in her four-year-old mind at the moment. She would name them after characters in stories or after the pattern of their shell. One in particular was called *kramtyti*. That means *nibble* in Lithuanian. The snail was missing part of its tail, the end likely taken as a snack by one of its siblings. *Kramtyti* quickly became her favorite.” Hannibal pauses, then in a gentle voice whispers, “She always did so love the broken ones.”

“You and her have that in common.”

Hannibal turns to look down at Will. They give one another watery smiles. The moonlight streams through the window, casting a beam of white light over Hannibal’s face. He looks like a ghost, an angel, a mythical being not at all grounded in reality.

Will doesn’t think he’s ever looked more beautiful.

“Will you keep talking?” Will asks. “Until I fall asleep again.”

“Yes, darling.”

“Thank you, *mon coeur*.”

Hannibal shivers at the words. Will reaches up with a sweat-soaked hand and runs it across Hannibal’s face, from his gaunt cheekbones down to his protruding chin. Each inch touched is an inch discovered, an inch loved. Will allows his fingertips to meander, to explore. As Hannibal begins talking, Will slides his fingers against Hannibal’s lips, feeling the way they flex and move with each word uttered.

Will falls asleep and stays that way until morning.

Hannibal wakes first, as usual. He must have been up for some time because when Will manages to crack open his eyes, Hannibal is holding a brown paper bag filled with pastries as

well as a jar of some sort of juice (it's red, though Will is learning that there are lots of red fruits in the world, so that really doesn't narrow it down).

"Good morning," Hannibal murmurs. He leans down and presses a kiss to the tip of Will's nose. "How are you feeling, Mylimasis?"

Will stretches. He winces. "Sore. Very sore." His cock is half hard beneath his pajamas just from the pain alone.

Hannibal's nostrils flare. He must smell Will's arousal (and Will shudders, wondering if he will ever be able to hide his lust from the older man) because he reacts with a wide grin. "I take it that the soreness is not completely unwelcome."

Will gives Hannibal an unimpressed glare and gestures toward the bag. "What did you buy?"

Hannibal allows the shift in conversation, emptying out the contents of the bag onto the coffee table in their (incredibly large) room. "I brought a variety of things, some of which you've tried, others which are new." He points to a triangular pastry and says, "This is *sfogliatella* filled with almond paste." He gestures to a different pastry. "*Bomboloni*. Similar to the American donut, though of a much superior quality."

Will huffs and crosses his arms. "Of course it is. I don't think I've ever heard you compliment American food before."

Hannibal frowns (pouts) and brings out two apples from the bag which he begins to slice in quick, efficient movements (and where the knife came from, Will isn't sure, as Hannibal wasn't holding it only a moment prior). "I admire many types of American cuisine. For example, I am particularly fond of gumbo. Especially if it's made with long pig."

Will giggles, unable to help himself. "You are so ridiculous. You're lucky I love you."

Hannibal's eyes soften. He sets the knife onto the table, then puts the sliced apple onto a plate. "I am, Will. I truly am."

Will flushes and dips his head. He grabs a slice of apple and pops it into his mouth. His teeth sink into the fruit with a satisfying crunch, tangy sweetness bursting across his tongue. Will licks his lips to clear away any remaining juice and then reaches for one of the *bomboloni*. His sweet tooth was something that never got fed when Will lived on his own; after all, there are only so many sweet things to eat in the swamps of Louisiana. Hannibal, now that he knows Will's preference for sugary things, has taken to feeding Will as many sweets, desserts, and confections as possible. Each one is bought or made with Will in mind; Hannibal prefers more refined tastes, things that are tart and savory rather than sweet. No, all of those are solely for Will.

Will thinks it should be impossible to love someone as much as he loves Hannibal.

They finish their breakfast, shower and dress, then take to the streets. Naples is a lovely city perched right at the edge of the Tyrrhenian Sea. The smell of salt never leaves the air, and

Will breathes it in with joy, happy to have some sense of familiarity even here, halfway across the world.

Hannibal is rather adorable in his excitement. He takes Will to museums, castles, theaters, and on one memorable occasion the catacombs that run beneath the city. He showers Will with praise, from the way Will's accent slowly becomes less noticeable to the way his cheeks take on a sun-kissed hue from hours spent outside to the strength in Will's calves as he climbs up endless stairs to reach the top of a lighthouse. He showers Will with gifts. Clothing, books, food, jewelry. Nothing is too big or too small.

Will thinks he might burst from the feeling of spoiled contentment that lays, not unlike a purring kitten, in the middle of his chest.

On their third day in Naples, Hannibal receives a phone call from Jack.

The two of them are eating lunch outside of a café. Will is trying (and mostly succeeding) at eating his food at a calm, sedate pace rather than finishing it in a matter of minutes, no matter how delicious the shrimp pasta may be.

"Hello?" Hannibal says into the phone.

Will tilts his head back to face the sun, then shoves another bite of shrimp into his mouth.

"Yes. No. It is not a bother."

Will chews and swallows. He takes a sip of lemonade, swirling the tart liquid in his mouth. He swallows that, too.

"Of course. I appreciate you reaching out. I will expect to hear from you soon. Thank you. Goodbye."

Hannibal lowers his phone, smile lines crinkling the corners of his eyes.

"Who was that?" Will asks.

"Jack Crawford. It seems Lisa Clark has been charged with conspiracy to murder. Your phone call to Noah Larue has held up under scrutiny. The prosecution wishes to call me as a character witness to testify against Lisa."

Will gulps down the remainder of his lemonade, draining the glass in a matter of seconds. He wipes the back of his lip before asking, "Will you? Testify, I mean."

Hannibal eyes Will's empty glass with amusement. "I think I shall. Any opportunity in which I can twist the narrative away from the truth is an opportunity which should be taken."

Will closes his eyes. He imagines Bedelia splayed beneath him. The blood soaking her dress from the bullet wound. The warmth of her body. The icy flakes drifting around them, almost as if they were trapped in a snow globe. The smell of copper and salt.

The betrayal in Bedelia's face as Will sinks the scalpel into her heart.

“What are you thinking of, darling?”

When Will opens his eyes, he finds Hannibal intently staring at him from across their small table. His pupils are dilated.

“Bedelia,” Will admits.

Hannibal growls. Licks his lips. “You smell like hunger.”

Will chews on his bottom lip. “I thought I wouldn’t be hungry anymore once I started living with you. But my hunger…it’s changed. Evolved.”

“Evolution is a natural thing. Instead of denying our natural instincts, we must embrace them and cultivate them as the inspirations they are. You must allow yourself to be intimate with your instincts, Will.”

Will senses the double entendre behind the words. He pictures Hannibal spreading him on a table, devouring his hole before devouring his heart. He pictures Hannibal with a knife in his hand, gesturing for Will to finish the hunt. He pictures Hannibal taking Will over the body of their latest kill, both of them covered in blood and panting with adrenaline and lust.

Will smiles. “Yes. I think I will.”

Chapter End Notes

Translations (according to the *very* reliable Google Translate):

Il mio italiano non è ancora molto buono: My Italian is still not very good.

Primo viaggio in treno: First train journey?

Spero ti piaccia il tuo viaggio: Hope you enjoy your trip.

Mon coeur: My heart.

Healing

Chapter Summary

Hannibal falls ill after returning home from Italy. Will helps him to heal.

Palermo is exactly as Hannibal remembers it.

Looming mountains, spindly palm trees, a bustling city, and the salt-laced scent of the sea permeating every inch of warm, blowing air. Thousands of people walk along the cement sidewalks, eyes wandering, hands moving rapidly as they talk.

Hannibal and Will stand beneath the awning of a local café, both holding steaming cups of tea.

“What do you think?” Hannibal asks.

Will tilts his head up. His chocolate-colored curls blow lightly with the wind. His eyes squint as he stares up towards the sun. The light flickers for a moment as the sun peeks through puffy, white clouds.

“It’s beautiful,” Will says, voice completely earnest. “Can we see the ocean today? I feel as if I can taste it from here.”

“Of course, Mylimasis. Anything you want.”

Will grins, and Hannibal’s heart skips a beat inside of his chest.

“The Normal Chapel is less than a thirty-minute walk from the sea. Perhaps we can go after our tour?”

Will’s grin fades. His blue eyes, the same color as a storm-laden sea, watch Hannibal’s face with a near unnerving intensity. Hannibal feels as though he is on the other end of a wickedly sharp scalpel, cut open and picked apart for Will and Will alone.

“You don’t need to be nervous,” Will eventually says. His voice is low and soothing, almost as if Hannibal were a stray dog in need of comfort. “I’m going to love it. It’s almost like I have no choice; your feelings are so strong about the place that they’re wrapping me up like a warm blanket.” Will lifts his chin and stares straight into Hannibal’s eyes. “Don’t be worried. We’re one now, remember? That means acceptance. It's a lot easier to accept yourself rather than others.” A pause as Will scrunches up his freckled nose. “I think.”

“From the mouth of babes…” Hannibal murmurs. He leans down and presses a delicate kiss to the tip of Will’s nose.

It's a slow, leisurely walk to the palace. The outside of the building is rather unassuming: worn, orange-hued brick that crumbles away to reveal layers of older stone beneath; a flat roof covered in moss and bird droppings; windows surrounded by modern maroon shutters. The palace has been built for security, not beauty.

Like most things, the true treasure lies within.

Hannibal's palm is cool and dry as he guides Will through brick archways supported by granite columns. They walk up a set of stairs, then through one last door.

When they reach the chapel, Will pauses. Stops. His mouth parts, pink lips opening on a soft exhale as his eyes widen further and further as if desperate to take in every detail before it is suddenly cast into darkness.

If Will was radiant in the sunlight, he is resplendent in gold.

The gold gleams off the ceilings and walls, painting Will in brilliant halo. The blond strands in Will's hair catch the reflection and begin to shine. Glow. His blue eyes reflect the gold mosaics and turn a brilliant kaleidoscope of colors as they flit from one area of the chapel to another. Sweet and innocent, Will gasps out loud and raises a hand to cover his perfect mouth. The flush staining his cheeks only reinforces the thought in Hannibal's mind that he is, in fact, standing in the presence of an angel.

He has always believed in god. A powerful, inscrutable being who enjoyed killing its creations. Hannibal related to the idea in some way. Clung to the notion that killing felt good to god, and if man were created in his image, should killing not also feel good to man?

Hannibal has never, however, believed in angels. Prophets. Any sort of ancillary creature thought up by those with too much greed and too little time.

He believes now.

There is no doubt in Hannibal's mind that Will is an angel.

And he is all Hannibal's.

The thought is *intoxicating*.

Hannibal is silent as he watches Will move. The boy's eyes never close, not even for the fraction of a second it takes to blink. Will absorbs his surroundings like old paper soaking up ink. The gold surrounds him, enters him, *becomes* him. Every pore on the boy's body begins to shine, from the sweat on his brow to the sliver of sun-kissed skin visible beneath the cuff of his trousers. Hannibal would not be surprised if Will began to levitate, to ascend back to the heavenly plane from whence he so obviously came. The skin on his back would tear into bloody wings. His righteous rage would smite all who dared try to keep them apart.

Hannibal imagines that this is what Bedelia must have seen before she died. Will, the flame of vengeance burning in his eyes, a face fit for cherubim as he slides the scalpel beneath her ribs.

If only Hannibal were so lucky to meet such an end.

Will walks down the aisle of the chapel and stops in front of a skeleton mosaic inlaid in the marble floor. The white stone of the skeleton shines, reflects the gold walls much like Will does. Will's feet are paused, immovable as he stares down at the most important part of the entire chapel. Like so many times before, Will has found Hannibal's heart inside of the room. Has taken in every piece around him and then found the one thing that matters most to Hannibal, the one thing that connects him to his humanity.

"You're staring," Will whispers. He does not turn around, eyes still glued to the floor. The words echo in the large room, reverberating off golden walls until they reach the mosaics lining the vaulted ceiling.

"I am," Hannibal replies. He, too, does not blink. To miss even a single second of this moment would be a tragedy of the highest order. "You are resplendent, darling."

Will finally turns. His face turns from pink to red. The tips of his ears glow bright in the afternoon light. The scent of his aroused embarrassment floods the chapel like incense billowing out to aid in Hannibal's worship. And oh, how he *aches* to worship his beloved. He would get down on his knees, prostrate his body on the tiled floor, chant every scripture and sing every hymn if it meant he and Will could be together, always.

"Stop it," Will hisses. His eyes shine with unshed tears. "I can't…it's too *much* Hannibal."

"What is too much?"

"The way you're looking at me."

"And what way is that?"

Will grabs Hannibal's hand and tugs him behind a marble pillar. There, tucked into the corner of the chapel that forms the entrance to Hannibal's Mind Palace, Will whispers, "Like you want to *devour* me."

Hannibal bends down and brushes his lips against the heated skin of Will's cheek. He can feel Will's pulse beneath his mouth, can feel the rush of blood pounding beneath the thin layer of skin. Hannibal's teeth ache with the need to break through the delicate skin and bite into the supple flesh, to consume Will from the inside out, to drink of Will's blood as if it were his sacrament and salvation all in one.

"I do."

Will whines, something soft (something just for Hannibal). "Not here," he breathes out. "Later."

"As you wish."

Will shudders. His eyes grow hazy, heavy-lidded as Hannibal's arousal floods him, filters through his empathy and ends up in the bottom of his belly like rocks at the base of a sieve.

They emerge from the pillar hand in hand.

Across the chapel, a tour-guide sees their clasped hands and gives them a warm smile. "*Ciao signori! Posso aiutarla?* " Her voice is as warm as the golden walls, her teeth an unnatural shade of white.

"We are well, thank you."

The woman nods, then eyes Will with far too much interest. Hannibal feels his hackles rise; this moment he is sharing with Will is for them *alone*, not to be intruded on or sullied by anyone else.

Will, noticing the sudden tension in Hannibal's body, takes a single step forward. "Thank you," he says to the guide. He flutters his eyelashes and dips his chin in a submissive gesture. He looks at the woman's teeth rather than her eyes as he says, "The chapel is beautiful. But I think my dad and I are going to be leaving soon."

The woman beams at Will. "Of course," she coos with a thick accent. "Enjoy the rest of your stay."

Will tugs on Hannibal's hand and pulls him away. Once they are safely hidden in a crowd of other tourists, Will gives Hannibal an amused look and points to the exit. "Let's go. Before we add another skeleton to the crypt."

Besotted, Hannibal follows his darling out of the chapel and down the stone steps. The courtyard below is swarmed with visitors, the sun glinting off of camera lenses and cheap watches alike. Hannibal is silent as he allows Will to lead him away.

The word *we* echoes in Hannibal's mind like the tolling of church bells.

Their last night in Italy, Hannibal takes Will to the *Teatro Massimo* to watch *Orfeo ed Euridice*. He whispers the translated Italian into Will's ear, the scent of Will's arousal only increasing with each word spoken in honey-dripped tones. By the end of the first act, Will is squirming in his plush, velvet seat, a gorgeous flush spread over his freckled cheekbones.

"Listen, darling. He finds no beauty in his surroundings, despite being in paradise," Hannibal whispers. "He only craves the company of his love. Without her, paradise is nothing."

Will's eyes shine with tears. They trickle down his skin, bringing with them the smell of the sea.

"See," Hannibal implores. "See how he aches for his love. It is how I ache for you, Mylimasis. The sweetest foods would crumble in my mouth without your tongue to share them with. The sweetest sounds would be like knives in my ears without your voice there to accompany them. Nothing would be savored, nothing enjoyed without you by my side."

"*Hannibal*," Will says.

Hannibal reaches across his seat and tugs Will into his lap. The boy's familiar, warm weight is a comfort against Hannibal's legs. He wraps his arms around Will's torso and buries his

nose into Will's wild curls. The smell of Will, the feel of Will, the sound of Will, all of it surrounds Hannibal until each and every sense that Hannibal has is full of *Will Will Will*.

After the opera is finished, the two return to their hotel and make love to the sounds of whispered pleas and endless sighs of pleasure. Hannibal wishes this moment were endless, that he could capture it in glass and replay it over and over again until the world crumbled away and he and Will, together, were the only things left.

Alas, such a wish is not to be.

In the morning, Hannibal and Will eat a quick breakfast of coffee (for Hannibal), hot chocolate (for Will), and *cornettos* filled with apricot jam (for them both).

Hannibal's jet is waiting at an airstrip outside of Palermo. Will commandeers Hannibal's tablet and watches several movies on their plane ride back to Baltimore. Hannibal is content to sit and watch his beloved, uninterested in doing anything else.

Baltimore is cold and unforgiving when they arrive. A thin layer of snow coats the ground. The sky is full of heavy, gray clouds. An icy wind cuts through Hannibal's clothing, and he draws Will tighter against him in an attempt to keep them both warm.

"Are you going to find another mentor?" Will asks in the car. His head rests against the back of the leather seat, posture poor, exhaustion clear in the purple bags beneath his eyes.

"I already have one selected. Dr. Heimlich is a well-known psychiatrist from Maryland. He recently moved to Baltimore to open a new private practice. Bedelia mentioned him once not long before her passing."

Will snorts at the mention of Bedelia's passing. "Well, I guess that's good." Will bites his bottom lip. Hannibal is instantly distracted by the sight of that plush, pink skin turning white beneath Will's tooth. "What about all of Bedelia's old patients?"

"They have also been referred out. I believe Ms. Verger will be following me to Dr. Heimlich's office."

Another snort. "Yeah, and I'm sure you had *nothing* to do with that."

"You know me so well, darling."

They both collapse into bed once home. The house has been thoroughly cleaned in their absence, every room (save the basement, of course) dusted and wiped down. It smells faintly like the organic lavender cleaner Hannibal asks the maids to use. His nose prefers the scent to the more harsh cleaning chemicals available.

They both sleep peacefully, grateful to be home once more.

Hannibal wakes with a sore throat, a body wracked by chills, and a nose so inflamed that even the soft touch of a tissue causes tears to well in his eyes.

Will shifts on the bed next to him, waking up at Hannibal's whimper of pain. Will's eyes widen as he takes in Hannibal's red-rimmed eyes and chapped lips. "Oh," Will says, his voice rough from sleep. "I think you're sick.

Hannibal attempts to glare at the boy. His tongue feels thick and heavy as he says, "No, I am not. I do not *get* sick."

"You look pretty sick to me," Will drawls. He places a hand on Hannibal's forehead. It feels like ice on his skin, and for the first time in his life, he attempts to pull away from the boy rather than push closer. "Feels like you have a fever."

Certainly not petulant, Hannibal says (once again), "I am not ill. I have always had an excellent immune system. This is no more than a slight…reaction as my body adjusts to the cold climate once more." Hannibal opens his mouth to say something else, but a rather loud sneeze interrupts the thought.

Will tries to hold back a giggle.

He fails spectacularly.

"Looks like it's my turn to take care of you," he crows, practically vibrating with amusement.

"You could try to look more upset," Hannibal sniffs.

Will's face instantly morphs from humor to love. Adoration. "Oh, I wasn't making fun of you *mon coeur*. I'm just happy I have a chance to pay you back for all the times you've taken such good care of me. This is a special thing." Will reaches down and finds one of Hannibal's hands buried beneath the comforter. He brings it to his mouth and presses delicate kisses along the tips of Hannibal's fingers.

"Thank you," Hannibal croaks. Another sneeze wracks his body. His head pounds, and Hannibal thinks he can feel the cool winter air all the way down to his bones.

"I'm going to go get some breakfast. Do you feel hungry?"

Hannibal feels…worn. Like fabric that has been stretched and washed one time too many. "No. But I must eat if I am to heal."

Will bends down and presses a gentle kiss to Hannibal's forehead. Will's lips are like cool silk against Hannibal's sensitive skin, and he sighs at the contact. "I'll be back, then. Just give me a minute."

Will slips from the bed, leaving the space cold and empty in his absence. Hannibal frowns and turns onto his back, immediately regretting the movement when it only causes his head to explode with pain.

It seems an eternity before Will returns. Each second is filled with the quiet wheezing of Hannibal's stuttered breath and the uncomfortable shift of his back against the mattress.

“Here,” Will says. He walks over to Hannibal’s side of the bed and sets a plate onto the nightstand. A steaming omelet with fresh parsley decorates the white porcelain. Next to the plate, Will places a cup of orange juice and a bottle of ibuprofen. It’s a testament to how ill Hannibal truly is that he cannot smell either the omelet or the juice, despite their proximity.

Will chews on his bottom lip a moment (and that should be *Hannibal’s* teeth biting down on Will’s lip) before saying, “I’m not really sure what medicine you need. Or if I’ll even be able to find it. You’ve got a whole pharmacy inside of your cabinet downstairs.”

Hannibal tries to laugh. It quickly morphs into a cough, and fresh tears flood his eyes as he sits up with a wince and rests against the headboard. “Really, darling, I don’t need any medicine. Just some rest and food.”

Will rolls his eyes. “You’re being stubborn. These will take away the pain. Don’t you want that?”

Hannibal glances over at the innocuous white bottle. He’s never taken ibuprofen before, not even after he was cut following a rather exciting hunt (and a pig who thought himself so incredibly clever at having made a mark on Hannibal before being hung and bled dry). The thought of taking one of the pills (of being so weak, so incapable of caring for himself that he needed to rely on a man-made chemical instead) causes Hannibal’s stomach to churn.

He shakes his head.

Sighing, Will hands Hannibal the plate and a fork. Will watches Hannibal take each bite, placing small kisses on the corners of his lips when he finishes the food. The orange juice tastes like…nothing on Hannibal’s tongue. Cool liquid with absolutely no discernible flavor. Hannibal still drains the entire glass before setting the empty cup on his nightstand.

Even full of food, Hannibal still feels empty. He shivers and slips back beneath the covers of the bed, desperately wishing sleep would overtake him and this entire illness would dissolve like frost evaporating in the sun.

It doesn’t.

He turns one way on the bed, then the other. Each pull of fabric against his skin feels a thousand tiny needles piercing his flesh. His breath is too loud, quivering and shaking as the air is sucked into his lungs. The room is too cold, his mouth too hot.

Will sits beside him through it all. He runs a gentle hand through Hannibal’s hair, the feel of his fingertips soothing rather than grating. He hums a nameless tune when Hannibal’s breathing becomes uneven, guiding Hannibal to lay on his side rather than his back. When Hannibal’s bladder becomes too pressing an ache to ignore, Will lifts Hannibal’s arm over his head and shoulders the man’s weight as they walk, one agonizing step at a time, over to the en suite bathroom.

“Shower,” Hannibal murmurs. His eyes are heavy-lidded and hazy as he points to the glass shower walls. “The steam will be good for my respiration.”

“Are you sure?” Will asks. “What if you slip? I’m not…I don’t think I can hold you up. How about a bath?”

Hannibal nods. He tries to think. Everything seems like a dream, his movements slow and syrupy, the air shimmering in front of his eyes like a mirage. Even Will’s voice seems as though it is coming from far away.

“Can you get undressed?”

Hannibal reaches up to remove his shirt, only to find his arms are unable to comply with his mind’s request. They hang, limp and useless, on either side of his torso.

“Sit,” Will commands, and Hannibal is helpless to do anything but obey. He sits on the edge of the tub and watches as Will strips off his shirt, tossing it to the floor in a heap. Hannibal’s sleep pants are next, the soft silk like sandpaper against his aching skin. His boxers are last, and Hannibal breathes a sigh of relief when he is finally naked against the cool porcelain of the tub.

Will turns on the water and places his hand underneath the steady stream. He waits until it is the right temperature before gesturing for Hannibal to slip inside. Hannibal does, completely without grace, a small splash of water cascading over the side of the tub and wetting the pile of clothing on the floor.

Will reaches into the cabinet beneath the sink and draws out various bath salts and oils.

“Any requests?” he asks softly.

Hannibal shakes his head. The movement makes him dizzy, and he slides further into the water with a low grunt.

Will brings over a few bottles of oil. Hannibal cannot smell them, but by the light orange coloring he supposes they smell of citrus. Will lets out a few drops of oil into the rapidly rising water along with a handful of epsom salt. The water turns a pretty shade of peach, the feel of it smooth against Hannibal’s exposed body. By the time the bath is full, Hannibal’s head is pounding so intensely that he has to close his eyes or risk throwing up into the water.

“I’m going to turn off the light,” Will whispers.

Hannibal is incapable of responding, merely tips his head back against the tub and wishes for a quick, painless death.

Will leaves the bathroom for a moment. A cool rush of air accompanies his exit as the steam and heat of the bathroom seeps out. When Will returns, he brings with him a glass of water and the white bottle of ibuprofen.

“Take these,” Will begs. “Please. I can’t…I hate knowing you’re in so much pain. If not for you, at least take them for me.”

Hannibal cannot stand seeing Will in such agony. What a selfish fool he has been. Will’s empathy takes Hannibal’s pain and makes it his own. By refusing the pain medicine,

Hannibal has been hurting his beloved.

“M’sorry,” he slurs. His mouth is stuffed full with cotton. It takes all of his strength to grab the two round pills from Will’s outstretched hand and swallow them down with a gulp of water.

Hannibal dozes. He has no idea how long he lays there in the dark, fingertips pruning as the water turns from hot to cold. Eventually, Will coaxes him into standing. With quick, sure movements, Will pats Hannibal dry, careful not to rub the cotton towel against Hannibal’s skin. Hannibal glares down at his wet pajamas, instead walking naked to the bed before sliding beneath the comforter.

Sleep is not the respite Hannibal had hoped it would be. Nightmares haunt his dreams, shadows from the past stretching like black claws that tear into Hannibal’s psyche and destroy him from the inside out. He cannot help the cries that come from deep within his belly, the terror that seats itself in his stomach and refuses to leave. At one point, Hannibal imagines an angel with a tongue of fire and eyes made of ice is praying over him, whispering words in some primordial language that Hannibal cannot hope to decipher.

When Hannibal wakes, it’s to darkness. The curtains are pulled closed over the window. He has no idea what time it is, and his eyes refuse to focus, refuse to make sense of the clock hanging across from the bed.

Will is nowhere to be seen.

Hannibal feels the loss of Will like that of an amputated limb. There’s a phantom ache without Will’s presence by his side. Hannibal reaches for his phone and squints against the bright screen, surprised to find that it is 9:24 at night. He must have slept the entire day.

Hannibal cannot remember the last time such a thing happened.

With a groan, Hannibal forces himself to sit up. He grits his teeth as a wave of nausea floods his body. The wave passes, though, and Hannibal continues to lift himself out of the bed before dressing in a lightweight silk robe and a clean pair of boxers. Then he is walking down the stairs, holding to the railing with clenched knuckles.

He finds Will sprawled in front of the fireplace in the office. Will’s head is propped up by his hands, his feet kicked up and dangling in the air as he reads from a book off of the ground.

“Will,” Hannibal says, voice thick and nasally. “Darling. I apologize for not making you dinner.”

Will jumps at the sudden noise and quickly stands. He runs over to Hannibal and practically drags him over to the leather chair near the fireplace. The leather is warm and soft from the flames, and Hannibal sinks into it with a grateful sigh.

“How are you feeling?” Will asks. “And don’t apologize. We don’t apologize for things that are out of our control.”

Despite how sick he is feeling, Hannibal can feel a small smile curving over his lips. “I’ve taught you well.”

Will huffs and rolls his eyes. “Sure, *mon coeur*. Whatever you say.” Will’s face softens, melts like a pat of butter over a warm pan. “I made dinner. It’s definitely not as good as yours, but I hope it makes you feel better.”

Hannibal’s heart flutters, though whether it’s from Will’s term of endearment or his own illness, he cannot say. “I would be honored to eat whatever you have made.” As Hannibal goes to stand, Will pushes him back into the chair with firm but gentle hands.

“Stay,” Will says.

Again, Hannibal’s heart flutters inside of his chest. Will’s bossiness (his confidence, his ability to command Hannibal with only a look or a word) is making the ache in Hannibal’s body turn from pain to arousal.

“Yes, darling,” Hannibal whispers.

Will beams and flits out of the room. Hannibal is saddened he cannot smell Will, cannot smell his emotions, cannot smell what he made for dinner. Without his smell, Hannibal feels so…common.

It’s a horrific feeling.

Will comes back to the office with a bowl of soup. Steam curls up, wafting in the air, and on instinct Hannibal inhales deeply to scent the ingredients, only to be stopped by the inflammation in his nose. He frowns (he most certainly does not pout) before taking the bowl from Will and setting it on his lap.

There’s chives on top, freshly chopped. Beneath that is cooked chicken and carrots. A plethora of other minced herbs. All of it is surrounded by a light-colored broth.

Will made him chicken soup.

Hannibal thinks he might cry.

“Is it…” Will squirms, misinterpreting Hannibal’s silence. “I can make something else, if you want. I know it’s not as fancy as what you usually make but I—”

Hannibal is unspeakably rude and leans forward to cut off Will’s words with a searing kiss. He sets the bowl of soup to the side, careful not to spill a single drop of the precious meal, and pulls Will onto his lap. He gently grasps Will’s curls in his palm, guiding the boy’s delicious mouth to his own before licking inside.

Though Hannibal cannot taste Will, he can still feel the silky insides of his mouth. The slight roughness of his tongue. The sharp edges of his teeth.

Will lets out a tiny whine at the contact. Hannibal swallows the sound and continues lapping into Will’s mouth until both their lips are red and swollen and spit-slick. His arms ache and

his thighs burn, but he continues holding tightly to his beloved, unwilling (unable) to let go, to let even a single inch separate their bodies.

“Hannibal,” Will gasps. He pulls away. His blue eyes are hazy. His hair is mussed from Hannibal’s grip. “You need to eat the soup before it gets cold.”

Hannibal growls, enamored with the shiver that runs down Will’s spine at the low sound. “Yes, Mylimasis. It would be a disgrace to let such a gift go to waste.”

Will beams.

The angels in heaven weep at the sight.

Eating while unable to taste is not something Hannibal ever wishes to grow accustomed to. The texture of the soup is familiar, and his brain supplies the scents and tastes that should be there but are not. Sparks of sweet broth appear on his tongue. Hints of salt, along with the fresh swell of a chewed herb, glance like phantoms in the side of his vision. Hannibal knows he cannot taste these things, yet his mind still imagines that they are there.

It’s agony.

After, when every drop of soup has been savored as much as Hannibal is able to in his current predicament, Will takes the empty bowl to the kitchen and returns with slightly damp hands and a wet stain spreading over the fabric of his white t-shirt. The water causes the fabric to become translucent. Hannibal watches, enraptured at the slight pink of Will’s pert nipple as it appears like magic through the sodden shirt.

“Will you join me in bed?” Hannibal asks. He’s annoyed with how nasally he sounds, how unbecoming and uncharming his usually svelte voice is.

“Sure,” Will says, blushing. He grabs Hannibal’s hand and helps him to stand. Hannibal’s head spins as soon as he is vertical, and he quickly reaches out to grip the mantle above the fireplace for support. Will coos at him, offers him words of comfort and praise in Italian and French, and Hannibal feels his face heat, both from the flames and the arousal at hearing Will’s voice say such sweet things.

Hannibal eventually manages to calm his racing mind. The room stops twisting and turning in front of his eyes. He holds to Will tightly as the boy leads him upstairs and into the bed.

As soon as he’s laying down, Hannibal notices that Will is hard. It’s not always an easy thing to spot; Will’s cock is so small, even when aroused, that it hardly tents the fabric of his pants. Hannibal usually relies on his nose to tell him when Will is hard. The scent of Will’s arousal is so ingrained in Hannibal’s body and mind, he wouldn’t be surprised that if he were to cut open his veins it would release the smell of the sharp, glacial scent.

“Will,” Hannibal says. “Darling. Would you like me to take care of you? You have taken such good care of me all day. Such a good and brave boy you are for me.”

Will whimpers. His eyes turn black in the low light. His hips jerk, an involuntary movement, as he comes to sit beside where Hannibal is laying.

Hannibal reaches up and runs the pad of his thumb over Will's nipple, moisture seeping into his skin as he presses down. His arm aches with the movement, but he keeps rubbing, the dulcet sounds of Will's moans filling the empty room like bursts of lightning in the dead of night.

"Want you," Will begs. "Need you inside of me."

Hannibal pauses. Lowers his hand.

He's not hard.

For the first time since he and Will have consummated their relationship, Hannibal cannot seem to get erect. He squeezes his eyes shut and pictures Will, bent over on the bed and begging for Hannibal's cock. He sees Will just as the boy was only a few days ago, bouncing up and down on Hannibal's lap as they fed each other bites of fruit and other delicacies in the bed at their hotel. He imagines Will in all manner of compromising positions in every scenario possible. And though his veins hum with liquid arousal and his heart beats fast in his chest, Hannibal remains soft.

Useless.

Before Hannibal can react, Will pulls back the comforter to uncover Hannibal's body. Hannibal keeps his eyes shut tight, unable to face Will (unable to face the boy's disappointment as Hannibal fails, once more, to provide him with what he needs).

"Oh," Will says. Hannibal curses his illness, curses the weakness of his flesh. He would slaughter a thousand men, eat each of their beating hearts straight from their chests if it meant he could be whole again (could be what Will deserves) instead of this useless heap of flesh.

"Will…" Hannibal croaks. He opens his eyes the tiniest sliver.

Will is sitting, hands perched in his lap, with a look of confusion on his face. He bites down on his bottom lip, gaze sweeping Hannibal's body before resting, once more, on the soft swell of his cock beneath his silk robe.

"You're not hard," Will says. There is no judgment in his voice, yet shame curls along Hannibal's spine, an unfamiliar serpent that spews poison into his ear, whispering that he is not good enough, not worthy enough, not *enough*.

Before Will, Hannibal had never felt such a thing. He had never opened himself up to another enough to care how his actions affected them. Shame was as foreign a concept as guilt, and Hannibal never felt either. But that was before. Now, he has someone he cares about. Someone he loves enough to show all of himself to, both the monster beneath his person suit and the blackened heart beneath. With that display comes vulnerability.

Hannibal hates being vulnerable.

But he loves Will more.

“It’s fine,” Will says. He’s confused, sure, but Hannibal’s body is weeping shame and embarrassment, the man clearly unhappy with how his illness is affecting him. The unhappiness billows off of him like a thick winter storm, icy tendrils of shame stabbing Will in the heart each time he looks at his love. “You’re sick. You need sleep, not sex.”

Hannibal shifts. Groans in pain. “I can still help you. I have my hands. My mouth.”

Will’s erection (which had started flagging as soon as Will realized Hannibal was not hard) comes back in a sudden rush of blood and arousal. “No, really,” Will argues half-heartedly. “You should go back to bed. My…erection will go away on its own eventually.”

It’s weird; Will can distinctly remember the last time he masturbated without Hannibal beside him. It was only a few weeks after they had first slept together, and Hannibal was away at work. Memories of their lovemaking had crept into Will’s mind while he slept, and he ended up touching himself for only a moment before spilling inside of his boxers.

That was months ago.

It seems strange, almost wrong somehow, to touch himself with Hannibal close by.

“Please,” Hannibal rasps, a pitiful sound. Will’s stomach does a strange flip. Lust simmers in his veins, runs down his spine and into his aching cock. “I can…Let me help you.”

Oh, Will *likes* this. Likes Hannibal, helpless and begging. Likes that Hannibal is so desperate to touch Will that he would wade through his own pain and illness just to see Will satisfied.

Does that make Will a bad person? Should he feel guilty that he is turned on when Hannibal is so obviously in pain? Will has always considered himself a monster, but even this seems like taking things too far.

“Talk to me, Will.” Hannibal says. Commands. “What thoughts are racing through that wonderful mind of yours?”

Will flushes and ducks his head. His curls, long overgrown and nearly the length of his collarbones, provide adequate cover for him to hide behind. “I don’t want to say it,” Will says.

“Now I must know.”

Will huffs and tucks his hair behind his ears, revealing Hannibal’s rapturous gaze. “You’ll be mad.” Or disgusted. That would hurt even worse.

“Never, beloved. I could never be angry at you.”

Will raises an eyebrow and gives Hannibal an unimpressed look. “You got mad last week when I made you buy me a strawberry crêpe from the street vendor.”

Hannibal winces. “That *strawberry* was no more than a chemical concoction of high-fructose corn syrup and artificial colorant.” A pause. Then, “I suppose I may have reacted more… violently than was strictly necessary.”

Will nods. “See? How am I going to ask you about something actually important when you get mad about something that’s not important at all?”

“Your health is always of the utmost importance, Will.” Hannibal sighs and presses himself further into the mattress. “I apologize. I was not angry at you. Never *at* you. Just at the circumstances surrounding you.”

“Sure. But maybe these circumstances are making you angry. And I don’t want to tell you something that might make you more upset.”

Hannibal peers at Will. His eyes shift, slowly, like those of a serpent, maroon flitting from one side of Will’s face to the other. “How wise you are, Mylimasis. I promise, no matter what you say, I will not get upset at you. Do you trust me?”

With a sigh, Will nods his head. “Yes. I trust you.” Still, Will squirms, his calves rubbing up against the bottom of his thighs. He bites into his bottom lip, tasting fresh blood. Hannibal watches without saying a word, unblinking as he stares at Will. The silence grows. Will feels his heart pounding inside of his chest. His palms become sweaty, and he rubs them against his shirt, wincing at the feel of fabric clinging to the moist skin.

All of a sudden Will blurts, “I like that you can’t move. That you’re in pain but still want to touch me. That I can…take control.”

His face is on fire. Will can only imagine what shade of red his cheeks are currently flushed.

Hannibal’s eyes flash in the darkness.

“Oh, darling,” he murmurs. “If only you could feel what your words do to me. They are like an inferno inside of my veins, a blaze I cannot control. I *burn* for your love.”

Will whines and dips his head down to kiss Hannibal. The older man’s fever causes his lips to be so much warmer than usual. They feel like sparks against Will’s mouth, and he eagerly licks into Hannibal and slides his tongue into that welcoming heat.

They kiss for what seems like hours. Their movements become slow, lazy. Hannibal stays laying against the pillow, his hands resting lightly along the back of Will’s neck. Though he is not pulling down, Hannibal’s large hands are still like weights holding Will close, keeping them pressed together. Their lips become wet and slippery. When Will pulls back, a string of saliva stays connected between their mouths. It snaps when Will turns his head, spit dripping across his chin.

Hannibal is breathing heavily, each inhale stuttering and each exhale loud and shaking. Will unties Hannibal’s robe and pushes it off of his arms, careful not to rub the fabric against his sensitive skin. Hannibal is trembling when Will palms at his soft cock. Even like this,

Hannibal is enormous, and the scent of him (unwashed and musky) causes a fresh wave of saliva to flood Will's mouth.

Will slowly pulls off Hannibal's boxers, watching with wonder as goosebumps erupt over Hannibal's olive skin. They spread from his thighs onto pelvis before disappearing beneath the thick hair covering his chest. Will leans forward and presses his nose to the juncture of Hannibal's thigh, breathing in the scent of his skin. It seems brighter somehow, sharper, like the illness is drawing the arousal straight from Hannibal's veins and depositing it onto his flesh.

Will's own boxers are shoved off much more quickly. He doesn't bother with his shirt, too excited to waste time taking it off when Hannibal is right there, so willing and eager and ready.

"I want…" Will pulls back, licks at his lips, tastes the sweat from Hannibal's groin sitting like a drug against his tongue. "I want to be inside you this time. And you can just lay there. You don't even have to move."

Hannibal's eyes turn black, pupils swallowing any remaining maroon.

"Yes," he hisses. "Take what you need, beloved. Use me."

Will growls at Hannibal's words and reaches over to grab the lubricant from the nightstand. His fingers are shaking as he coats them in the slippery substance. He drops the bottle onto the floor without a second thought, his mind completely focused on the one area of Hannibal that has, up until this point, been hidden from him.

Hannibal stays silent as Will pushes his knees apart, spreading the older man's legs. The hair around Hannibal's cock is thick and curly. It trails down from the base of his limp shaft, covering his sac and the line of flesh that leads to his hole. Will spread Hannibal's firm cheeks and stares, mesmerized, at the tiny wrinkled rim that meets his gaze.

"Will," Hannibal whispers.

"Shh. Let me look."

Will does more than look. He places the shiny tip of his finger against Hannibal's pink hole and pushes, amazed at how easily it sinks inside. It slides all the way to the first knuckle, almost as Hannibal's body has been waiting for this, waiting for *him*.

And oh, if Hannibal's skin was warm on the outside, he is simply *molten* within. Will wants to sink inside, bury himself inside of Hannibal and claim the man as thoroughly as he has claimed Will.

Will keeps pressing, watching with wonder as his finger slips all the way until his palm hits the bottom of Hannibal's ass. His finger is completely surrounded. Hidden inside of Hannibal. He pulls it out, slow, before pressing inside once more. Hannibal's rim flutters around the base of his finger, tight and hungry and so hot it feels like Will might melt.

“Will,” Hannibal says again, this time slightly louder.

“Am I hurting you?” Will asks, breathless. He forces himself to look away from where his finger is gently pumping in and out of Hannibal’s body and turns instead to look at Hannibal’s face.

A face which is etched in endless agony.

Will’s finger immediately retreats, and Hannibal whines.

“No,” he moans. “No, don’t leave. It doesn’t hurt. It’s simply a lot to take in. Please, continue.”

Will licks his lips and pushes two fingers all the way into Hannibal, until the flat of his palm is cradling Hannibal’s ass again.

Hannibal’s eyes roll back into his head. A tremor makes its way through his body, a wave that starts at his shoulders and continues to his toes.

Will crooks his fingers up, aiming for the spot inside of Hannibal that Will knows will bring the man endless pleasure. He finds it after a few seconds of careful prodding, a soft bump that is easily caressed by the pads of his fingertips.

Hannibal chokes and shudders. Will strokes the spot again. Hannibal whines. Will doesn’t ever think he’s heard such a beautiful sound.

“Are you ready?” Will asks. Gasps. It feels like all the air has been sucked from his lungs and replaced with fire, with burning flames that singe his throat and fill his body with an almost unbearable heat.

“Yes. Yes, *please*.”

Will burns brighter. His cock is nearly purple, precum weeping from the tip and staining the comforter below. He doesn’t think he has ever been so aroused in his life.

Is this what Hannibal feels like when Will begs? When Will whines and mewls and spreads his legs in order to get Hannibal inside even a moment faster? Will feels high off of the sensation. At the ability that only *he* has to make someone as proud as Hannibal tremble and beg for his cock.

With a low groan, Will slides up so that his knees are pressed against Hannibal’s thighs, pushing them further apart. His cock kisses the entrance to Hannibal’s body, smearing sticky precum along the already-wet rim. It flutters, almost as if begging Will to plunge inside, and who is Will to deny Hannibal anything?

Will thrusts inside.

He comes.

There's no preamble. No build-up. One second he is outside of Hannibal's body, wet and aching and shivering, and the next he is spilling into the tightest heat he's ever experienced in his life.

And he can't seem to stop thrusting.

"Oh fuck—oh god— *Hannibal*." Will cries. His cum only makes Hannibal slicker. Easier to grind into. Each thrust is a loud slap of skin-on-skin, a wet squelching noise when Will pulls out before shoving back inside.

And Hannibal is *still soft*.

It shouldn't be so arousing, but it is. The sight of Hannibal's soft shaft leaking a steady stream of precum that slides down, down until it mingles with Will's own cum pouring from Hannibal's hole has Will moaning and thrusting even faster. The muscles in his legs ache from the new and novel motion, the quick snaps of his hips almost painful as he buries himself over and over again into the most exquisite pleasure he's ever felt in his life.

Hannibal is incoherent above him. His voice rises and falls in warbling moans, occasional curses slipping from his lips like slices of a forbidden fruit.

"Hannibal, *mon coeur*. *Tu te sens tellement serré, putain*."

Hannibal gasps and clenches around Will's cock.

Will comes again.

Pleasure crawls across his body like nails raking along his exposed skin. It feels so good it hurts, it hurts, it hurts and Will *can't stop moving*.

Hannibal is crying. Tears streak down his face. They glisten on his fever-soaked skin. His cheekbones are flushed and red. His lips are chapped save for the corners where small beads of saliva well up, collect, before dripping down the sides of his chin. His nose is stuffed. It causes him to only breathe from his mouth, each inhale ragged and uneven.

Will grasps Hannibal's thighs and pulls the man's legs even further apart. Will's palms are slick, wet with sweat, and they slide along the thick coating of dark hair on Hannibal's legs as Will opens him up to the absolute limit. Will is determined to drill a place for himself inside of Hannibal, to leave a piece of himself so deep inside of the man that nothing and no one will ever remove it.

With a final shout, Will comes apart one last time. There's hardly anything that spills from his cock, his seed completely emptied from his sac and into Hannibal's waiting body.

Sweat trails down Will's soaked back. His shirt sticks to his torso like a second skin. Will quickly strips it off, throws it down to the floor.

He keeps his cock inside of Hannibal as long as possible, until the build-up of seed and lube and sweat force his soft shaft to slip out of Hannibal's body and into the cruel, cold air of the bedroom.

Hannibal is still crying.

Will freezes, thighs shaking, heart pounding.

“Oh my god,” he whispers. “Hannibal, I’m so sorry. I didn’t—I wasn’t—you’re *sick*, and I was just using you like some kind of—”

Hannibal drags himself up from the bed and pulls Will into a bruising kiss. Their teeth clack as Hannibal licks inside Will’s mouth. His breath is stale from his sickness, and Will doesn’t think anything has ever tasted so sweet. They both moan, and Will is crying too, overwhelmed by all of the emotions pouring off of Hannibal. His feelings swirl in the dark room, combining with Will’s own emotions, and it feels like he’s drowning, choking, lost to a love so powerful and deep that there is no way he could possibly escape.

He doesn’t want to.

“Was I too rough?” Will asks. He cups Hannibal’s cheek and frowns at how dry and hot his skin is. “You need some more medicine.”

“You were perfect,” Hannibal says, starry-eyed. “A vision come to life. I would gladly suffer a thousand days of sickness if it meant you could lose yourself inside me like that again.”

Will blushes and squirms, unbearably aroused and happy and far too tired to do anything but peck a small kiss to Hannibal’s lovely nose. “Okay. If you’re sure. I’ll go grab the pills and a washcloth to clean up.”

“Don’t be long, Mylimasis.”

Will nuzzles Hannibal’s face a final time before slipping away. He shivers as the cool air surrounds his body, all of the heat that had been trapped around Hannibal dispelled and replaced with something cold and unfeeling. Will shoves his boxers back on and practically runs down the stairs and into the kitchen, grabbing the familiar white bottle, a glass of water, and a washcloth. He darts back into the bedroom and cleans both himself and Hannibal before helping Hannibal swallow two of the round pills.

They sleep for hours, Hannibal like a furnace against Will’s side.

Hannibal’s illness lasts another two days. Will continues caring for him. He cooks and cleans and reads to Hannibal when the sun is setting and both of them are too tired to do much else. They have sex again, Will slipping inside Hannibal at a much more sedate pace. He is gentle this time, rolling his hips instead of thrusting, and when he comes it is with a quiet sigh and a deep-seated sense of satisfaction. Hannibal remains soft throughout, and Will’s arousal burns all the higher for it.

When Hannibal is finally healed, he makes plans to begin his new mentorship with Dr. Heimlich.

“Heimlich? Isn’t that what it’s called when you press on someone’s stomach and make them throw up?” Will asks. He finishes chopping a handful of basil and throws it into a pan

alongside a few strips of searing thigh.

Hannibal frowns, but his eyes crinkle at the edges with amusement. “The Heimlich maneuver is used to assist victims of choking, yes. It is also a very common surname. I am positive there is no connection between the act and my soon-to-be mentor.”

“That’s too bad,” Will drawls. “Would have made him more interesting.”

Will is trying (really, he is) to not be jealous that Hannibal is going back to work. Back to spend more time with someone who is not Will.

Will knows how well trying to control his jealousy ended last time.

Hannibal, ever keen to what thoughts Will’s mind is mulling over, says, “There is no need to feel jealous of my new mentor. He is nothing more than a means to an end. All my thoughts are ever devoted to you. It is unfortunate that the same cannot be said for my time and attention. Still, I hope you will come talk to me if you are ever feeling neglected.”

Will sighs. “You don’t make me feel neglected, *mon coeur*. I know what being neglected is. This…this isn’t it.” A pause. Then, “I still don’t like that you have to be away from me.”

“Nor I, darling.”

Hannibal flips the strips of thigh, searing the other sides to a perfect golden-brown. “These past few weeks with you have been the best of my life. I will always look back on them fondly.”

Will frowns. He grabs two plates, two cups, and two sets of silverware, balancing them all together in a pile before walking to the dining room and setting the table. When he walks back into the kitchen, Hannibal is plating the seared thigh on a long, thin tray. He picks up the thigh, as well as a bowl of quinoa spinach salad, and gestures for Will to follow him back into the dining room.

“I just don’t understand,” Will says, spearing a piece of meat and bringing it to his mouth. He chews slowly, savoring the burst of flavor on his tongue. The meat practically melts inside of his mouth, soft and tender and juicy. Will wonders what kind of person has a thigh that tastes so good. “It’s not like you need the money. Why do you need to go back at all?”

Hannibal takes a sip of his wine. “For appearances, darling. And because, as much as we enjoy one another’s company, it is good to expand the mind in other ways. There’s something to be said for the satisfaction achieved by a full day of work.”

Will pouts. He pokes at his quinoa salad. “Are you worried you would grow bored of me?”

“Never. You know that could never be possible.”

“Maybe. Even you don’t know everything.”

“Almost,” Hannibal teases, and Will can’t help the smile that breaks over his face.

The next day, when Hannibal does leave for work at far too early an hour, Will can't keep from pulling the man down for a long, messy kiss, making sure to muss Hannibal's carefully gelled hair. Hannibal gives him a reprimanding look (one filled with heat and the promise of punishment in the future) before leaving out the bedroom door.

Will…wallows.

The house is unbearably empty without Hannibal there beside him. The past few weeks have been bliss, the two of them completely intertwined in every way possible. Now, though, Hannibal is gone.

And Will has been left behind.

Again.

Will paces the downstairs for a time, feet wearing a familiar path between the front door, the kitchen, and the office. Eventually, though, Will's thoughts manage to catch up with his body, and the loneliness becomes too much to bear. Every step echoes in the empty rooms, each breath loud without Hannibal's own breathing there to complement it, the beating of his heart off-rhythm without Hannibal's pulse to guide him.

Without thinking, Will grabs a coat, slips on his favorite pair of boots, and walks out the front door.

The air is cool. Brisk. Will's breath puffs up in a small cloud in front of face each time he exhales. The sky is a light gray, the sun hidden away behind low-hanging clouds. The cement is the same color as the sky, and Will keeps his eyes on the ground as he walks away from Hannibal's house and down the block.

He's never truly explored Hannibal's neighborhood. Usually, Will and Hannibal take walks somewhere more…outdoorsy. The harbor or the conservatory. Sometimes in a local park. Will is glad to have this opportunity to explore his home (even if it means he walks alone).

After ten or fifteen minutes, Will's hands begin to go numb from the cold. He shoves them into the pockets of his coat, cursing himself for not grabbing a pair of gloves. His body is still not used to Baltimore winters. Louisiana was never this cold. Will wonders if he will ever truly adapt to this new environment, or if the bayou runs so deep in his veins that no matter how much time passes he will always shiver and shake during the winter months.

As he makes his way around the block, Will pauses. Stops.

There's a dog in the road.

The neighborhood is small, the cluster of houses (mansions) tightly packed together. There's no one outside though, no mothers pushing their children in strollers or fathers jogging in sweatpants and overpriced jackets. There's only this dog, scrappy and alone.

Kind of like Will.

There's a rope around its neck. No collar. Its fur is matted with dried mud and other unknown substances. It trots along the road with determination, not looking at Will as it passes him on its way south.

Will, undeterred by the dog's lack of interest, turns around and begins trailing behind. Though there are no cars on the street now, that doesn't mean one might not appear at any moment. Will doesn't know what he would do if he saw the dog get hit.

Will begins whistling and clicking his tongue. The dog stops in the middle of the road, head tilted at the sudden noise. It turns to face Will with dark eyes. Will's heart skips a beat. He kneels down on the sidewalk, ignoring the way the freezing cement chills his skin and seeps into his bones, and continues cooing at the dog.

"Come here," Will croons. "I can help you. Poor thing, out here in the cold. Wouldn't you like to be somewhere warm? We have lots of food for you and a nice fireplace." Will pauses. Though Hannibal had claimed he could never be mad at Will, there are limits to any person's patience. Will won't bring the dog inside of Hannibal's house without permission. And though Will knows, rationally, that the dog can't understand him (that the dog is reacting to the tone of his voice rather than the actual words), Will still feels bad about lying to it. "Well, maybe not the fireplace yet. But the garage is nice and a hell of a lot warmer than out here."

The dog tilts its head. Its tongue emerges, pink and wet, sending a plume of white fog into the air.

"That's it. Good dog. Just come a little bit closer and I can help you."

Will holds his breath as the dog seems to be considering his words. In the distance, Will hears the familiar rumble of a car starting, the low hum of an engine.

"Please," Will begs. "I just want you to be safe."

The dog dips its head and trots over to where Will is still kneeling on the sidewalk. Will can't help his relieved laughter as he pets along the dog's head. Its fur is surprisingly soft and silky, the color of it like that of a ripe pumpkin.

"Good boy," Will coos. "Thank you."

Will takes hold of the rope around the dog's neck and, carefully, leads the dog along the sidewalk and back home. Several cars pass as they are walking. Will's shoulders slump a little further with each one, grateful that he was able to coax the dog out of the road before they drove by.

The rope is thick and coarse. It rubs against his palm, irritating the skin. By the time they return home, Will is sure he has rope burn all along his hand.

"Here," Will says. He directs the dog toward the garage, punching in the code and waiting for the door to open. Inside, there's plenty of space for the dog to rest. Hannibal's Bentley only takes up a small space when it's there; without it, the garage is practically empty.

Will ties the dog's rope to a nearby shelf and pats it on the head. As he goes inside, he begins making a mental list of all the things he will need to keep the dog comfortable until Hannibal returns home.

He definitely does not think of a plan for what to do or say to convince Hannibal to let the dog stay. Will supposes that he'll just have to play that part by ear.

Will goes into the kitchen first to grab a knife, a bowl of water, and a package of dried jerky from the pantry. He takes each item into the garage, careful to not spill the water as he sets it on the ground. While the dog drinks (which it does with long, loud gulps), Will gently saws through the rope around its neck, relieved to find that rope was not tight enough to injure the dog or tear into its skin. Besides some matted fur, it looks as though the dog is healthy, at least in the area around its neck.

The dog drinks the entire bowl of water. It licks at the empty bowl and then stares at Will with mournful eyes. Will giggles and takes the bowl inside, refilling it and bringing it back out.

This time, the dog drinks at a much more sedate pace. When the water is half gone, Will tears open the package of jerky, amused at how quickly the dog forgets the water as all its attention is instantly glued to Will's hands and the piece of meat he is holding.

"Do you know any commands?" Will asks. He's never had a dog before, never had any sort of pet except for the wild animals he lived with when he survived out on his own. What kinds of tricks are dogs supposed to know? "How about sit?"

The dog stares at the jerky. A drop of saliva hangs from its mouth and lands on the cement floor with a loud *splat*.

"Sorry, it's not nice to tease when you're probably hungry. We can try again later."

Will feeds the dog, once piece of jerky at a time. The bag is quickly emptied. The dog licks its lips, eyes Will with a sort of wary acceptance, and then finishes drinking the rest of the water in the bowl. This time when Will goes inside, he fetches a few towels for the dog to lay on as well as filling the water bowl once more.

"See, it's not so bad in here," Will says once he returns. He lays down the towels and sits on the ground nearby. He pats the towels, unsurprised when the dog chooses to stay standing away from Will rather than coming closer.

"Trust has to be earned," Will tells it. "I understand. But don't worry; I'm not going anywhere."

Will isn't sure how much time passes. It seems like only a moment before the dog's eyes begin to droop, and it nearly falls asleep while standing. With another round of coaxing (and another bag of jerky), Will is able to get the dog onto the pile of towels. It falls asleep not long after. Will runs his hand along the dog's fur, mesmerized by the silky texture. A lump forms in his throat.

Before his father kicked him out, Will had begged him for a dog. Will would feed any strays that wandered near their trailer, ignoring the pain in his own empty stomach as he gave away his precious fish and any other food he had managed to scrounge up.

His father of course denied Will's request. It is one of the few things his father got right. They could hardly feed themselves; it would have been cruel to bring in another mouth and then slowly watch it starve.

Now, though…now Will has all the food in the world. He has a safe place to sleep and a man who loves him more than should be possible.

Will wants to keep the damn dog.

"What should I call you?" Will ponders. The dog is still asleep, its legs twitching and jerking as it chases some imaginary prey. Will glances beneath the dog's stomach and hums, considering. "A boy. I'm sure I can think of a good boy name. Though it's stupid that a name can only be for a boy or a girl. Why does it matter whether someone has a dick or not when deciding whether to call them Alex versus Alexandra? Humans can be so stupid sometimes."

The garage door begins to open, and Will lets out a startled cry, jumping off of the ground and rising to his feet. The dog also jumps up at the sudden noise. He doesn't bark though (Will knew he was a good boy). He merely watches the incoming Bentley with steady, unblinking eyes.

Hannibal parks the car. Will cannot tell what his face looks like through the tinted windshield. Will feels sick to his stomach with nerves, and he wipes his sweaty palms against his jeans, wincing as the rope burn on his hand stings from scraping against the rough fabric.

"Hello," Will greets as soon as Hannibal steps out of the car. "Uh, I found a dog. I was taking a walk around the neighborhood and found him. He doesn't have a collar. He's really nice. I want to keep him. Please?" This is all uttered in a single breath.

"You…found a dog." Hannibal's face is expressionless, his mask firmly in place. It hurts more than Will cares to admit.

"Yes, and he's a good boy. It's so cold outside, and the poor thing is starving. He needs our help."

"Will, I'm not so sure that this is a good idea." Hannibal takes a step forward, and the dog lets out a quiet growl. His lips curl back in a snarl. He steps in front of Will, effectively blocking Hannibal's from stepping any closer to Will.

Tears begin to gather in Will's eyes. "Didn't I take care of you when you were sick? I can cook and clean. I'm responsible. Please, Hannibal. I…I need this."

Hannibal sighs. His shoulders lower. His mask disappears, and Will breathes a sigh of relief at being able to read Hannibal's emotions once more. There's unease, a tinge of unhappiness, perhaps some annoyance.

Overwhelmingly though there is love. Pride. Hannibal is proud of Will for standing up for himself, for demanding something of Hannibal rather than thinking himself unworthy of things.

“Very well,” Hannibal says. “I suppose it has some good sense if it has already decided you are worthy of protection.”

The dog, as though he has his own empathy disorder, lowers his hackles and begins happily panting. He even wags his tail a bit as Hannibal comes closer to inspect him.

“What are you going to name it?” Hannibal asks. He crouches to the floor in order to look at the dog’s teeth, seemingly uncaring of the dog hair and dirty water soaking into the fabric of his expensive suit. Satisfied with what he’s found, Hannibal stands once more and attempts to brush some of the fur off of his waistcoat.

“Winston,” Will says. He’s not sure where the name came from, but it seems…right. “His name is Winston.”

“Hello, Winston,” Hannibal says. “Welcome to the family.”

Survival Instincts

Chapter Summary

Hannibal and Will welcome the newest member of their family into their lives. Hannibal receives a disturbing letter, and Will begins to train Winston in the art of defense.

Hannibal looks at the dog. The dog looks back.

Sighing, Hannibal says, “Let’s take it inside, then.”

In all honesty, it is a rather lovely dog. Burnished auburn fur, long legs, intelligent eyes. It will look even better once it’s had a hot bath and a trim.

“Thank you,” Will whispers. His eyes are shining with tears. Hannibal smiles, small and besotted, and gestures for Will to lead the dog into the house.

“To the basement,” Hannibal says. “There’s a drain in the floor that won’t clog if, or rather when, fur gets inside.”

Will nods and clicks his tongue. The dog instantly looks at Will. It follows the boy with sharp black eyes as Will walks into the house and through the pantry. Will pauses to open the basement door, and Hannibal is mildly impressed with the ease at which Will leads the dog downstairs.

It takes about an hour of bathing for the dog to be clean enough for Hannibal to feel comfortable allowing it access to any of the upper floors. Hannibal estimates that at least three or four pounds of wet hair have ended up being washed down the drain. The drain has, of course, been used to dispose of much more solid materials in the past. Hannibal isn’t particularly worried about it clogging now.

With careful, precise movements, Hannibal trims off all the fur that was too gnarled or knotted to brush. Will had graciously sacrificed one of his old hairbrushes to the cause, and when the brush runs smoothly through the dog’s fur—save for a few patches around its neck that Hannibal quickly cuts away—Hannibal deems the dog ready to be brought upstairs, at least to the main level.

He and Will will discuss whether the dog is ever allowed in the bedrooms (the answer is no, of course).

“We’ll need dog food,” Will chirps at his side, practically vibrating with excitement. Will leads the dog back up the basement steps and through the pantry. “And a bed. And…I’m not really sure what else a dog needs.”

“A trip to the vet,” Hannibal wryly adds. “Certainly a dremel for its nails.”

Will beams, ignoring Hannibal’s dry tone. “Yeah, both of those. Can we go tomorrow since you have the day off?”

Hannibal sighs. He had planned on taking Will to the conservatory; it’s one of the boy’s favorite places, and they haven’t been able to visit in over a month. Hannibal supposes that Will is just as excited about taking the dog to the vet as he would be about going to see the new plants at the conservatory. Will has a strange affection for all things living it seems.

A perfect complement to Hannibal’s love of all things dead.

“Let it outside,” Hannibal reminds Will. “We don’t know yet if the thing is house-trained. I would prefer to clean up as few messes as possible.”

“I wouldn’t make you clean them up,” Will quickly says. His cheeks are flushed red, eyes flashing a bright blue as he practically skips to the French doors and lets the dog into the backyard.

Hannibal sighs again and walks upstairs to shower, putting on a fresh set of clothing as he prepares dinner for himself and Will. And the dog.

The next day, Hannibal takes Will and the dog to a local veterinarian. There are plenty of veterinarians to choose from in Baltimore; this one came highly recommended by Mrs. Komeda.

“A vet?” she had asked that morning on the phone. “Since when does the great and mighty Hannibal Lecter need the services of a vet?”

“Since he adopted a child,” Hannibal responds.

Mrs. Komeda had laughed, offered her condolences, and then recommended a vet close by.

“This is only the beginning,” she had warned him, cackling. “Next thing you know, you’ll be the proud owner of seven dogs and a raccoon.”

Hannibal had shuddered at the thought.

Shopping for the dog proves to be a much more pleasant experience. Hannibal has always enjoyed spending money, and pet supplies seem to be no exception.

“Another leash?” Will asks, eyes wide. “But we already have two!”

“Yes darling, but this one is corded in case the dog pulls.” Hannibal, ignoring Will’s spluttering protests, sets the leash into their overfilled cart and wheels it into the next aisle. Alongside the three leashes are three matching collars, several dog beds, a few bags of organic dog food, a brush, nail trimmers, a dremel, and at least a dozen dog toys of various materials and sizes.

Will's face reminds Hannibal of when they first met; Will had been overwhelmed so easily back then, unused to being cared for (unused to being loved).

The dog, to its credit, seems to be entirely unaffected by the whole endeavor. It trails beside their cart with a lolling tongue and tiny *clicks* as its nails tap against the tile floor.

By the time they return home, Hannibal's bank account has a sizable dent, the back of his Bentley is packed with bags, and Will's scent is a heady mixture of overwhelmed and grateful.

Hannibal is loath to return to work on Wednesday, but the appearance of Margot Verger softens the blow. She is undoubtedly the most interesting client Hannibal meets with during the week.

"Good morning," he greets her. Dr. Heimlich sits beside Hannibal in a ridiculous tweed suit that is both ill-fitting and ill-looking.

"Morning," Margot greets. Her eyes shift from one doctor to the other, clearly overwhelmed. "I thought it would just be Dr. Lecter today."

Dr. Heimlich frowns, clearly displeased at her statement. He gives a rather imperious sniff before saying, "Dr. Lecter is in no way trained to have a one-on-one session with a client. He has only been in the field of psychiatry for a few weeks. He has only been my mentee for two days. I am sorry, of course, you feel that your expectations are not being met. I suggest you temper them in the future."

Margot's face becomes like that of a stone carving. Implacable. Immovable. Hannibal's own face is no better, mask so firmly in place he can practically feel the stitches pulling at the corners of his jaw. They tug and sting, uncomfortable. Hannibal has grown used to leaving his face free and unencumbered. It seems…wrong, now, to wear his mask. With Will, there is no need to hide (and even with his mask and person suit on, Hannibal is still unable to hide from his darling boy, and the thought of being so distinctly seen sends a shock of excitement racing down Hannibal's spine). Still, the mask must stay on, and so Hannibal pushes his discomfort to the side and focuses instead on the broken girl in front of him.

They begin to discuss her brother (the reason she is at therapy, both because he requested that she attend and also caused the deep-seated trauma to begin with).

"We all have a gauge for humanity that twitches when we see another person. Tell me, Margot, what twitches when you see your brother?"

Beside Hannibal, Dr. Heimlich twitches his nose.

"Not my gauge for humanity," Margot responds.

"You don't recognize in your brother basic human traits. You dehumanize him as much as he dehumanizes you." As much as Hannibal dehumanizes them both. Though Margot is a mildy diverting distraction for Hannibal's dull moments at work during the week, she is merely

that: a distraction. A pig whose only recourse is to chew off its own arm in an attempt to escape the trap it's been ensnared by.

Margot's blue eyes are glacial. Cool and cutting. "At least I'm never going to be the worst person I know."

Dr. Heimlich clears his throat. "Do you view your brother as the worst person you know?"

It takes all of Hannibal's willpower not to roll his eyes at the inane question. At least Margot looks as impressed with Dr. Heimlich's heavy-handed steering of the conversation as Hannibal (which is to say, not at all). The girl has some good sense, it would seem.

Margot finishes her session, and Hannibal wades through another three hours of therapy (Hannibal worries he himself will need extensive therapy before his training as a psychiatrist is completed) before finally driving home.

Will greets him at the garage door with a cold nose and chapped lips.

"We've been in the yard," Will explains breathlessly. His hair is windswept, curls falling every which way over his forehead and shoulders. He's wearing his blue coat, the same shade as wild sweet Williams. Beside Will, the dog looks equally windswept, its ears perked and listening as if it could understand their conversation.

"Perhaps this weekend we can take the dog to Wolf Trap. I imagine it would like to explore the stream as much as you."

Will giggles, the sound like the tinkling of chimes.

Hannibal falls a little further in love.

"What were you doing in the yard?" Hannibal asks. He walks deeper into the house, taking off his suit jacket and carefully wrapping it over his arm.

"Oh, I was trying to teach Winston some commands. I found a dog training manual in your library. Did you know you had one?"

Hannibal tilts his head. "I did not. Though, I have nearly ten thousand books in my office. It's safe to assume there are books on every sort of subject in there."

Will grins. "Yeah, that's why I went looking in the first place. At least the book was in English and not Chinese or something."

"I imadine that would complicate the matter, yes."

Will and Hannibal both stand there in the living room, smiling at one another like fools. The dog seems to realize it is being ignored and lets out a huff, trotting over to where one of its beds is lying on the floor. He circles it, sniffing the new material, before landing in a pile of fluff and fur.

Hannibal goes upstairs, changes, and then follows Will into the office. They sit in front of the fire while Will demonstrates the progress he has made with Winston. It is rather remarkable what Will has managed to accomplish within a single day; the dog can sit, lay, and shake, all on command. Armed only with a handful of treats and sheer determination, Will is a certainly force to be reckoned with.

On Saturday, Hannibal packs a picnic basket with a variety of Will's favorite foods: ash-salt baked snapper, lemongrass risotto, snail pesto buns, and an apple tart. Each item is lovingly lowered into a picnic basket and covered with the faded Afghan that Will had picked out for their first picnic nearly five months ago.

"It's so nice outside," Will says as soon as they step out of the car and into the park. The dog follows closely behind Will, not tugging at its leash but not glued to Will's side, either. Its nose twitches as it picks up the litany of new scents pouring from the busy park.

"Indeed it is," Hannibal agrees. He tilts his head back and basks in the bright sun for a moment before gesturing for Will to take the lead. "You choose our location, darling."

Will beams and clicks his tongue, leading the dog and Hannibal along a gravel path and over to a sprawling white oak tree. There is no shade as the tree's branches are still barren, still firmly clutched in the hands of winter. Still, the trunk is large and provides a nice barricade against the chilled wind. Hannibal is pleased with Will's choice, and he tells the boy as much, delighting in the flush that stains Will's cheeks a stunning shade of pink.

Hannibal spreads out the blanket. He also sets out their food. The dog sits on the grass beside them, tongue lolling out as it watches the people passing along the gravel path. Other dogs also walk by, but Winston remains seated, not barking or causing a ruckus despite the ample distractions.

When they finish lunch, Will takes the dog's leash and meanders around the harbor. Hannibal is content to stay and watch. He breathes deeply, lungs burning with the cool, crisp air. Will's scent filters through from a distance, a bright splash of color against the dull gray afternoon.

During Hannibal's next appointment with Margot Verger, he learns just how indelicate Dr. Heimlich's line of questioning can be.

"I have a new prescription I would like you to try," Dr. Heimlich says. He's sitting, one knee crossed over the other, a blank notepad perched in his lap. "However, as you are female, there are some considerations to keep in mind."

"Female considerations?" Margot asks, a single dark eyebrow quirked.

Hannibal hides his smile behind a subtle cough.

"Exactly," Dr. Heimlich says, sniffing. "The medication can affect a fetus in utero. Are you currently pregnant or expecting to be pregnant within the next six months?"

Hannibal is surprised when Margot answers yes.

“I see.” Dr. Heimlich shifts in seat, no doubt recalibrating his medical knowledge to try and stretch the vast emptiness of his brain as he attempts (and fails) to remember the protocol for Margot’s situation. Hannibal has a feeling that Dr. Heimlich does not often interact with females, let alone females young enough to give birth. “Is this pregnancy planned?”

“Planned for whom?” Margot quips. “For the father, yes. For me, not as much.” Margot’s eyes tighten, the corners wrinkling as she squints down at the floor.

“A child is not something to be taken lightly,” Dr. Heimlich sternly mutters. “It should be planned for both parties. Was the pregnancy consensual?”

“Consent is not part of my vocabulary, doctor.” Margot’s voice is tired. Worn like the wooden countertops of an oft-visited bar.

“There are measures you can take.”

“Are you talking about an abortion?”

Dr. Heimlich becomes visibly flustered. Hannibal doesn’t think he’s ever witnessed a more incompetent psychiatrist. How on earth did Hannibal’s mentorship become entrusted to such an incapable person? At least Hannibal is learning what *not* to do once he is licensed.

Margot refuses to talk anymore about her pregnancy. Hannibal is the one to walk her to the door once the session has ended. As Margot reaches up to turn the knob, her sleeve shifts, exposing the pale skin of her wrist.

Wrapped around her wrist is a ring of black-and-purple bruises.

Hannibal says nothing, merely wishes Margot a pleasant day. He wonders if perhaps the abuse afflicted on her by her brother has taken a more…intimate nature.

Hannibal ponders this turn of events as he is driving home. He stops at his mailbox and picks up the thick stack of envelopes that await him. Once he has parked his car, it is only a matter of seconds before Will is bounding into the garage, the dog not far behind.

“Hannibal!” Will shouts. He runs up and envelopes Hannibal in a strong hug. His scent is warm, pleasant. A balm after Hannibal’s trying day. Hannibal leans down and lifts the boy up, allows Will to wrap his legs around Hannibal’s waist, his arms around Hannibal’s neck. Hannibal buries his nose in the curls at the base of Will’s neck and wonders how he ever lived without such a thing as part of his daily life.

“Darling,” Hannibal greets. “How was your day?”

“It’s better now,” Will chirps. He bends down and kisses the tip of Hannibal’s nose. “Take me inside, I want to show you the song I learned.”

Hannibal smiles and obeys, carrying Will into the house and depositing him onto the piano bench in the office. He sets the mail onto the coffee table, then gestures for Will to begin.

“I am eager to hear your progress,” Hannibal confesses.

Will beams and turns to face the ivory keys. He bites his bottom lip. His hands are gentle as they lay across the piano, each finger plucking a single note before beginning the melody. Hannibal watches, enraptured, as Will's face becomes slack with contentment. His eyes are soft, a light blue today, the same shade as a robin's egg. His entire back arches and shifts as he moves with the music. By the end of the song, Hannibal is unashamed by the silent tears that pour down his face.

"Perfection," he says. "Utter perfection."

"Thanks, *mon coeur*," Will replies. He comes over and sits on Hannibal's lap. They kiss for a few minutes, lazy presses of lip and tongue that leave Hannibal breathless and hard. Will smirks as he grinds down against Hannibal's erection. He nuzzles the space behind Hannibal's ear, then flits away, the embodiment of temptation itself.

Hannibal shakes his head, adjusts his trousers, and gets up from his seat to grab the pile of mail before sitting back down and sifting through it. Will and Winston loll on the rug in front of the empty fireplace, a rope toy taut between the two.

Hannibal looks back down at the mail in his hands. There are all the typcial things, advertisements for local stores, a few letters from the opera house asking for donations. At the bottom of the pile is a plain white envelope. Hannibal frowns at the label, scrawling letters written with a slant he doesn't recognize. There is no return address or name indicating where the letter came from.

Hannibal opens the envelope and dips his fingers inside, drawing out a single, glossy photograph.

Time seems to stand still for a moment.

The picture is grainy, clearly taken from a great distance. The colors are muted, nearly black-and-white. The image was shot at night, perhaps with some kind of special lens, certainly from a high-quality camera.

It depicts Hannibal leaving Linda Roche's house the night of her death. He is wearing his plastic kill suit. In his left hand is the duffel bag where Linda's body was stashed as he walked back to his car. Even with the poor quality, there is no mistaking Hannibal's face, nor the incriminating outfit he is wearing.

There is no note along with the photo, no ransom note with a demand for money, no contact information. There is only the photo.

"What is it?" Will asks. He drops the rope he was using to play with Winston and comes to stand by Hannibal's side. The man is eerily still, staring down at the photograph he just placed on the coffee table. Will sees the photo but can't make out why it is causing Hannibal so much anxiety. "Hannibal?"

Hannibal's eyes raise, slowly, until they are finally facing Will. They may be trained on Will's face, but Hannibal's mind is clearly far away. Will sighs and slips onto Hannibal's lap,

resting his head on the man's shoulder, his nose pressed into the strong curve of Hannibal's neck.

It seems an eternity before Hannibal returns to himself. He begins to breathe deeply, great heaves of air that rush over Will's body like a cool wave.

"Hannibal?" Will asks again. He pulls away and stares into Hannibal's eyes. "What's going on?"

"The photo. That was taken the night I took Linda Roche and brought her here. Someone knows."

Someone knows.

The words chill Will to the core.

"What are you going to do?" Will whispers.

"I…don't know. The letter was left without a name or return address. Whoever took the photo was merely making a threat, a statement. They want me to be afraid. I have no doubt that a demand will soon follow."

Will squirms around so that he's facing the table again. He eyes the photo and frowns. "Can you…I don't know, check for fingerprints or something?"

Hannibal shakes his head. "I doubt there will be prints. Even if there were, my own hands have touched the photo. If I didn't destroy the prints with my own, any prints I managed to find would be untraceable. I am not a hacker; I cannot simply look up a fingerprint without access to some sort of database like the police have access to."

Will's frown deepens. "Does this mean you are going to stop hunting?"

"It is the wisest course of action, at least for now. Luckily our freezer is stocked at the moment."

"I'm more worried about you than the freezer," Will says blandly.

Hannibal's shoulders slump. He tugs Will further into his lap and kisses him. "I appreciate the concern, Mylimasis. Rest assured I will not be taking any unnecessary risks. I will find who sent the photo."

"And kill them," Will finishes.

"Yes. And kill them."

Will glances out the office window as if there might be someone peeking inside at this very moment. There is nothing but the barren tree from the backyard. The branches, dull brown and devoid of life, seem like skeletal hands reaching inside, clawing their way through the window to pluck Will up and away from Hannibal. Will shivers and nuzzles back into Hannibal's neck. The scent of Hannibal—spiced cologne, warm skin, and intoxicating musk

—invades Will's brain like a drug. He immediately relaxes, going boneless inside of Hannibal's welcoming arms.

"I'm scared," Will whispers.

"Oh beloved, I will protect you with my *life*." Hannibal's voice is steel wrapped in silk.

"That's what I'm scared of," Will whines. "I can't…You can't *leave* me. Not now. Not when I'm finally happy."

There's silence for a moment. Will listens to Hannibal breathe. He pulls in deep inhales, then pushes out rushed gusts of air through his nostrils. His entire chest seems to vibrate with each breath, almost like a cat purring.

"There will come a day when we will be parted," Hannibal whispers. "When one of us must succumb to the inevitability of death. When that day happens—and it will not be for many, many years my love—the other must continue on. My greatest hope is that you pass first. I never want to live in a world where I have left you alone."

"Me neither."

"But that day will not come for decades. Entire empires may rise and fall before we are parted. Do not fret on such things. They will not happen for a long time yet"

Will nods his head and forces himself to relax. Hannibal is right; he is always right. They are too young to die.

But isn't that how everyone feels? Invincible until the day they are not?

Will tries to push the thought away, but it lingers in his mind, festers like an infected wound.

The entire week is overshadowed by the arrival of that damned innocuous envelope. Each day Hannibal checks the mail as if expecting a bomb. Each day nothing arrives but more of the same: junk mail and charity letters begging for money.

Will feels nothing but relief when they head to Wolf Trap for the weekend. Winston has never been to the house before, and the dog instantly falls in love with the endless woods, cool stream, and chittering wildlife on the property.

"What new tricks shall you teach your companion today?" Hannibal asks. He is sitting on the porch, knees crossed, a sketchbook perched in his lap.

At first, Hannibal had refused to allow Will to come to Wolf Trap at all. He said it would be too dangerous. Will had begged, promising to stay within Hannibal's sight. There are far fewer places to hide here, out in the wilderness, than in the busy city of Baltimore. Hannibal had agreed, but only if Will remained within ten feet of him at all times.

As if Will wanted to be anywhere else.

“I want Winston to be a guard dog,” Will says. He reaches into his pocket and pulls out the bag of bacon bits he stole from the fridge. They are the perfect training tool as they are special enough to catch Winston’s attention without upsetting his stomach if he eats a lot; the bacon is so finely minced—destined, most likely, as a topper for some pretentious salad—that even if Winston were to eat the whole bag it would only amount to a few strips of bacon.

“A fine idea,” Hannibal says. His pencil pauses over the sketchpad. “I am assuming this training has been well-researched? I will not hesitate to rid ourselves of the dog if it hurts you, darling. There are certain lines that cannot be crossed.”

Will knows he should be upset that Hannibal just threatened to kill Winston, but all Will feels is that specific warmth that comes with Hannibal’s brand of love.

“Don’t worry so much,” Will chides. “Don’t you have faith in me?”

“Of course,” Hannibal immediately agrees. His eyes go soft around the edges. “You could have the world in your palm if you so desired.”

“Lucky for us, I just want a well-trained dog.”

“The world has missed out, then.”

Will rolls his eyes and grins. He clicks his tongue, gestures for Winston to sit. Winston instantly plops his rear end onto the grass, and Will rewards the dog with ear scratches and cooed words of praise.

The next few hours pass in a blur. Winston’s training so far has mainly consisted of simple commands: sit, stay, come, stop. Right now, Will is working to get Winston to bark with a signal. If he can do that, his training book says it is only a little more work to train a dog to bark in certain situations, such as a stranger coming into the house.

“Come on,” Will pleads. “Bark.”

Winston gives him a baleful look.

“Bark,” Will commands again.

Winston looks over to where Hannibal is watching, amused, from his wicker bench on the front porch.

“Trouble in paradise, darling?” Hannibal teases.

Will huffs and shoves his chilled hands into his pocket. They have been outside so long that his nose is frozen and his fingers and toes feel as though they might snap off if he bends them too far. “I think this is Winston’s way of saying he’s done for the day.”

“An excellent idea. I’ll go put some hot cocoa on the stove. Would you like trout for lunch? There is some left in the freezer, and I brought mushrooms and rice to make risotto.

Will perks up at the mention of risotto. “Okay, I guess we can be done for today.” He gives Winston one last piece of bacon to reward all his hard work and then walks into the house, wiping his shoes on the front rug so he doesn’t track mud and grass onto the hardwood floor.

Hannibal is in the kitchen. His back is to Will, broad and powerful. The thin material of his blue button-down hugs each and every muscle. Will traces the muscles with his eyes, noting the graceful way Hannibal lifts a pot over the stove, the light sound of his feet falling onto the tile floor, the way his hair shines in the dim afternoon light. Will’s eyes keep wandering further down to Hannibal’s trim waist and chiseled bottom.

“I can smell you, darling,” Hannibal growls.

Will jumps at the sudden noise and lets out an undignified squeak.

“Just looking,” he says, voice high-pitched.

“I feel like a strung-up piece of meat,” Hannibal muses. He turns to face Will. The cuffs of his sleeves have been unbuttoned. Rolled up to reveal the veins of his forearms, the thick dusting of dark hair that coats the olive-toned skin. Will would be embarrassed if he weren’t currently too busy salivating at the sight.

Hannibal takes a step closer. Another. Will doesn’t know whether to run forward into Hannibal’s arms or backwards toward the front door. Hannibal’s eyes are black as he strides up to Will until they are chest to chest.

“Is there something you need?” he asks.

“Yes,” Will breathes out, but he can’t seem to form any more words. He is lost, mind cluttered with hazy, lust-filled thoughts.

The plug inside of him suddenly feels inadequate. He aches for something bigger, something warmer.

Something Hannibal.

Will’s eyelids flutter shut, and he tilts his head back to expose his bare throat to Hannibal.

Groaning, Hannibal leans down and latches his mouth onto the sensitive area of skin between Will’s chin and neck. Will visibly shudders at the sudden sensation. His skin breaks out into goosebumps.

Hannibal’s mouth is warm and wet as it sucks delicate marks along Will’s throat. Each spot is left throbbing, Will’s heartbeat moving up to the layer of nerves just below the surface of his skin. The cool air rushes onto the dampness trailing from Hannibal’s lips, and Will rolls his groin forward until it is rubbing against Hannibal’s trousers.

“Fuck me?” Will whispers, the softness of his voice in direct contrast to the harshness of his words.

Hannibal nips one last time at Will's jaw before drawing himself back up. He slowly begins undoing the buttons of his dress shirt, then the button on the front of his slacks. Will's mouth continues to water. He can smell Hannibal's musk as he removes his briefs, the scent of it spicy and familiar on Will's tongue.

Once Hannibal is completely bare, he undresses Will with slow, careful movements. Will feels cherished. Loved. Each caress of Hannibal's hand along his exposed skin is a symphony of devotion. Each sigh from Hannibal's mouth is a song of worship. Will feels like there is a simmering fire in his veins. It shoots down his spine and spreads across his body until there isn't an inch of him that doesn't burn.

Will looks over and notices Winston curled up on the rug in front of the couch, nose tucked into his paws.

"Winston—" Will says, words trailing off once Hannibal slips a hand around his aching cock and begins stroking it.

"Shall I take you somewhere else?" Hannibal asks, amused.

Will can't think, not with Hannibal's hands around his cock. His hips thrust without his consent, grinding into Hannibal's palm to create a delicious friction.

The pot on the stove begins boiling. Will can barely hear it over the sound of his own loud, stuttered breathing.

"Hannibal…" Will moans. He turns around and shows Hannibal the golden plug sitting snugly inside of his ass. Hannibal growls at the sight and pushes Will onto the floor. Will falls onto his hands and knees, back arched, bottom perched up in the air.

"Perfect," Hannibal coos. "I will be able to fill you so well like this. Reach inside of you, spill my seed, plug you up afterward to keep it inside."

"Yes, fill me," Will begs. He cannot see Hannibal in his current position, but he hears when Hannibal kneels behind him. Hannibal's hands caress Will's sides, slide down his waist before holding tight enough to bruise.

Without preamble, Hannibal removes the plug. Will hears it fall to the floor with a dull *thud*. Something bigger, something *hotter* immediately takes its place.

Hannibal enters Will slowly. Gently. His cock sinks into Will's fluttering hole until Will can feel Hannibal's pelvis resting against his bottom. Hannibal's skin is radiating heat. Will's eyes roll back into his head at the sensation, and he cannot help but lean forward so that his forehead is resting against his arms, his nose only an inch from the ground.

Hannibal pulls back and then pushes back in at an even pace. The lube Will used to put in the plug was scant to begin with. Now, it is nearly non-existent, and Hannibal's cock drags along Will's inner walls, skin tugging on skin. The friction is so good that Will rolls his hips into the burn, silently begging for more.

For a while, the only sound is the slap of skin on skin and the faint bubbling of water in the background. Will spills onto the floor, then comes again when he feels Hannibal's seed flood his body.

Hannibal presses worshipful kisses along his sweat-soaked spine, then puts the plug back into Will's hole. The feel of Hannibal's burning-hot spend fills Will as well as any meal. He sighs, satiated, and then rises onto trembling feet.

"How are your knees?" Hannibal asks, looking down at the red marks on Will's knees and forearms with a possessive glean in his maroon eyes.

"Sore," Will says.

Hannibal licks his lips, then smiles. "Wonderful."

They dress in between slow, drawn-out presses of lips. Hannibal finishes making their late lunch—or early dinner, Will isn't quite sure which—while Will wipes his spend from the floor.

Hannibal brings over two mugs to the table. The hot cocoa is covered in whipped cream and a sprinkling of nutmeg. Will blows on it and slips the sweet liquid. He savors it, the heat of the chocolate nearly as warm as the seed sitting deep inside his belly.

Will gives Winston his plate after he's eating his dinner. He watches, amused, as the dog pushes the plate around the dining room with his tongue.

Hannibal is less impressed with the display. He sniffs and goes to the sink to begin washing his own plate, ignoring Winston's sad eyes at the lack of crumbs.

When Hannibal returns from work on Monday, there's a strange look on his face.

"What is it?" Will asks. He's chewing on the end of a pencil. The rubber eraser is a pleasing texture, soft yet hard. He chews it until it breaks in half, then spits the rubber onto Hannibal's desk with no remorse.

It speaks to how lost in thought Hannibal is that he does not even chastise Will for such a crude display.

"Hannibal?" Will asks again. "Is it another envelope? Another picture?"

"Yes," Hannibal finally says. His shoulders slump. He grabs a white envelope out of the pocket of his pea coat and sets it onto the desk. The chewed-up eraser sits next to it, glistening with saliva. Will looks at both and frowns.

Will grabs the envelope and opens the ripped flap. A single photograph sits inside, same as last time. Will turns the envelope upside-down and allows the photo to fall out. It flutters to the desk. Will squints his eyes, attempting to make sense of the image on the glossy paper.

"Is that…"

“Yes.”

“But…how?”

The image is of Hannibal and Will in Italy. They are holding hands and walking down the street outside of their hotel in Palermo. The wind is blowing, ruffling Will’s curls so that his face is obscured. Will can almost smell the sea air, can feel the muted sunlight on his face, can smell the café that sold freshly-squeezed orange juice across the street.

Will shudders and forces himself to look away from the photo. Hannibal is standing exactly as he was before, face blank, eyes looking off into the distance.

“What are we going to do?” Will asks. He hates how small his voice sounds, but the fear creeping up his throat threatens to steal all the air out of his lungs. He is surprised any words came out at all.

Winston whines next to the desk and rests his head on Will’s knee. Will reaches down to pet him, the familiar feel of his soft fur enough to stave off the worst of Will’s fear, at least for now.

“I’m going to call Chiyoh,” Hannibal says.

Will raises his eyebrows, surprised. “Chiyoh? Why?”

“Your safety is of the utmost importance. I am not risking you staying here, alone, when there is someone out there with enough time and resources to find us halfway across the world. For the time being, Chiyoh will stay with you while I am away at the office. Unfortunately, I have not worked with Dr. Heimlich long enough to ask for any time off.”

“You could quit,” Will suggests.

Hannibal mulls it over for a moment. “I will, if it is necessary. But that would be a last resort. I do not want to give this person any more power over our lives than they already have. My career will not be ruined due to fear.”

“But it could be ruined already,” Will says. He bites down on his bottom lip and laps up the welling droplets of blood. “They have a picture of you in your kill suit, Hannibal.”

“I *know*,” Hannibal snaps. “Do you think me a fool? That I do not realize the risks of what I have done?”

Will jerks away from Hannibal at the sound of his voice—at the bite in his words—and Hannibal immediately looks contrite. He softens his shoulders and kneels down on the floor by Will’s right side.

“Darling…” he begins.

Will knows, he *knows* that it is simply stress. That Hannibal loves him more than life itself and would never hurt him (at least not in any way that Will does not want). Still, Will’s fear

response is an involuntary thing. Years of abuse at the hands of his father have made him skittish.

He cannot help the tears that rise in his eyes.

His hands are shaking, palms coated in sweat. He gets up from the desk chair and stumbles away from where Hannibal is still kneeling on the floor, a look of horror dawning over his face.

“I…” Will’s tongue trips over the words just as his legs trip over the hallway rug. “I need a moment.” He runs up the stairs and into the guest room, shutting the door behind him and locking the knob. It won’t be able to keep Hannibal out, but it provides a barrier, a layer of protection that Will desperately needs right now.

He slumps to the ground, back against the door, and cries.

He hopes Hannibal cannot hear him.

The Favor

Chapter Summary

Hannibal calls Chiyoh. She travels to Baltimore to help protect Hannibal and Will.

Hannibal can hear Will crying.

He has never felt more ashamed, more afraid, more *guilty* in his entire life. Not even eating his own sister evoked such horrific feelings. Hannibal wishes he could turn back time, could repeat the last hour of his life so that he didn't cause Will—his darling, *perfect* boy—to quake in fear at the sight of his raised hand.

Hannibal stands outside of the closed guest room door and wishes.

Eventually, Will's cries dwindle into nothing. Hannibal isn't sure which is worse; Will's tears or his silence. At least when Will is crying then Hannibal can hear that he is there, alive. Hannibal curses himself once more and pulls out his phone, opening up the app that connects to his security cameras. In the image on his phone screen, he can see Will—who in real life is a mere foot away, yet completely out of reach. Will is sitting on the hard floor with his head pressed into his knees, shoulders hunched, entire body shrunk as small as possible (as if to make for a smaller target).

As much as Hannibal aches to stay (to be as close to Will as possible, even with the seemingly insurmountable door between them) there is much that Hannibal must do. He stares at the door for another minute, then two, then forces himself to walk downstairs.

Winston is sitting at the bottom of the staircase with doleful eyes. Hannibal ignores the dog and walks into his office.

First on his list of things that must be done is to call Chiyoh. She answers almost immediately, despite it being the middle of the night in France.

"Hannibal," she greets. Her voice is…wary. Guarded. Hannibal hates that the two of them are at odds.

He hates even more that Chiyoh bruised Will the last time they were together.

"Chiyoh," he says. "I need your help. There is a person who is attempting to blackmail me. They sent a compromising photograph to my home. It depicts an image in which I am leaving one of my hunts. As I work three days a week, I would be most grateful if you could come and stay with Will and I until this issue is resolved. Which it will be. Soon."

"I thought I wasn't allowed to be alone in a room with Will."

Hannibal sighs, pinches the bridge of his nose. “I will not apologize for the way I reacted. Seeing the bruises on Will’s wrist was devastating. It opened a door of rage inside my mind that I thought I had long since shut. But, that being said, I do not think it necessary to separate you and Will indefinitely. You are both my family; I hope the past can be put away, at least for now.”

Chiyoh is silent for a long moment. Hannibal nearly gets up to start pacing the office, a vice he never indulged in before. His feet practically burn as he stays seated.

“I do not know if your aunt will allow me to leave,” Chiyoh eventually says. “She is hesitant to be alone now that Robertus has passed. You will have to get her approval if I am to travel to Baltimore.”

“Very well,” Hannibal says. “I will talk to Lady Murasaki.”

Hannibal hangs up. He paces around his office, then walks to the kitchen and makes dinner for Will. He sets the food on the floor outside of the guest room on a wooden tray. When he knocks, Will answers in a broken voice that he’s not hungry. Hannibal bites his bottom lip hard enough to bleed and goes back downstairs. He paces the hallway between the office and kitchen.

He picks up his phone and calls Lady Murasaki.

“Yes?” Her voice is smooth. Accented. Unchanged from the last conversation they had after Robertus’s funeral.

Hannibal clears his throat. “Lady Murasaki. I have called to ask a favor.”

“A favor,” Lady Murasaki says, spiteful. “And if I find I am not in a giving mood?”

“Then I will demand it,” Hannibal says. “I need Chiyoh here. Will and I are in danger. Chiyoh has been trained to protect the Lecter household. She will do more good here in Baltimore than in France, at least for the next few weeks.”

Lady Murasaki scoffs. “What trouble have you gotten into now?”

For a moment, Hannibal feels very much like the teenager he was when Robertus found him all those years ago. The same guilt and shame wells up inside of him as it did each and every time he disappointed his aunt; instances that became fewer and further in-between the older that Hannibal became.

“There is someone with a compromising image of me during a hunt,” Hannibal admits.

He cannot miss the sharp intake of Lady Murasaki’s breath. This (Hannibal’s true nature, the nature of a beast) is the wedge that drove the two of them apart. It is the reason Hannibal was sent to boarding school, the reason Murasaki ended their physical relationship, the reason Hannibal did not visit France for years until his uncle was quite literally on death’s door.

“Foolish boy,” Murasaki hisses. “You will bring shame to our entire family.”

“Not if Chiyoh is here,” Hannibal argues. “I need her help to contain the situation before it spreads.”

“Fine. Take the girl. But I condemn this entire endeavor. I want no part of it. If asked, I will deny any and all knowledge.”

“I would expect nothing less,” Hannibal retorts. “Alert me once Chiyoh has left for Baltimore.”

Murasaki hangs up without another word for which Hannibal is grateful. His composure has slipped away, disappeared like smoke trickling out of an open window.

Hannibal goes back upstairs and knocks once more on Will’s door.

“Darling,” he says, keeping his voice low. “I just called Chiyoh. She will be coming to Baltimore. I promise to keep you safe. To keep us both safe.”

There’s a creaking sound. A scuffle of bare feet on wood. Slowly, ever-so-slowly, Will opens the guest room door. His eyes are red-rimmed, his nose puffy and damp. His curls look as though they have been consistently tugged on for the past hour or two. Even Will’s shirt has not been spared, tear marks soaked into the collar. There are wrinkles on the cuffs of his pants from where he’s been slumped on the ground.

“Hey,” Will says, hoarse. “Is that dinner?”

Hannibal does not glance down at the wooden tray, cannot tear his eyes from his beloved boy now that Will is once again in his sight. “Yes. Would you like to eat something?”

Will nods and opens the door wider. Hannibal scoops up the tray and follows Will into the room, careful not to get too close. He would die if he saw Will flinch from him again.

“What is it?” Will sniffs. He perches on the end of the bed, lithe legs dangling without touching the floor.

“*Bigusas*. It is a type of stew that my mother made for me when I was younger. There is chopped pork, onions, carrots, and fresh cabbage.”

Will makes an adorable humming noise and gratefully accepts the still-steaming soup. His first bite is quiet save for the scrape of his spoon against his teeth. The next bite is accompanied by a quiet moan that causes Hannibal’s trousers to grow suddenly tight.

Will finishes his meal, and Hannibal sits on the chair next to the bed, hands clenched on the fabric armrests to prevent himself from reaching for the boy.

“Thank you,” Will murmurs as soon as the bowl is empty. He drinks the freshly-squeezed lemonade sitting on the wooden tray, then gives the tray to Hannibal. “When will Chiyoh get here?”

“The flight itself takes around eight hours. I assume it will be at least ten before she arrives in Baltimore.”

Will nods and bites down on his bottom lip. He shifts so that his back is resting against the headboard, legs splayed in front of him. Hannibal traces the shape of Will's body, the generous slope of his torso, the delicate arch of his ankles, the swell of muscles in his calves and thighs.

"I'm sorry," Hannibal says. He is not ashamed of how broken his voice sounds. It is an honest expression of how his heart currently feels. "I have never…There has never been a time in my life where I have regretted my actions more. If there is *anything* I can do for penance, you have my word that I will see it done."

"Are you asking to be punished, *mon coeur*?" Will asks.

The sound of those words from Will's clever tongue is enough to send Hannibal's blood racing. "Yes. I am."

Will hums and tilts his head as though considering. "Can Winston spend the night upstairs in our room? Just this once. I know how much you hate his shedding."

"Actually," Hannibal begins, "it might be best for Winston to sleep at the foot of our bed. At least for the foreseeable future. You have trained him well, Mylimasis. I have no doubts that Winston will protect you if the need arises."

Will's entire face begins to glow at this confession. "You really mean it?"

Hannibal's heart aches. Will's doubt is a poisoned knife that lances his chest and sears into his bones. There is nothing Hannibal would not do for his boy; it seems that this sentiment has not been properly conveyed in their time together.

"Of course, darling. I would let Winston take my place in bed if it would make you smile. It saddens me that you would ever doubt such a thing."

Will peers at Hannibal with his endlessly all-seeing gaze. "I know you *think* you mean it. But what we think isn't always the same as what's true."

Another knife cuts into Hannibal's heart. "Then I shall endeavor to spend the rest of my life proving it to you." Hannibal stands from the bed and offers Will an outstretched palm. "Would you like to get Winston settled? I believe there is an extra dog bed in the garage that can be moved to our room. Hopefully Winston is as happy about the new sleeping arrangements as you."

"Sure," Will agrees. He stares at Hannibal for a moment, then says, "I forgive you. Even if you said no to Winston sleeping upstairs, I still would forgive you. I love you."

Hannibal attempts to keep the tears from his eyes. From the way Will is looking at him—with love, exasperation, and a fondness so profound it makes Hannibal ache—he is not sure he succeeds.

Murasaki texts Hannibal not long after Winston is brought to their bedroom. The text indicates that Chiyoh will arrive at the airstrip around six in the morning. Hannibal conveys

this to Will as they are bathing together, Will's back pressed against the thick hair of Hannibal's chest.

Hannibal's eyes are nearly closed with bliss as he massages shampoo into Will's scalp. The boy's curls are long and healthy, glancing across his collarbone when they fall from Hannibal's gently moving fingers.

"I think I should cut it," Will says, tilting his neck back to allow Hannibal better access. "It gets in the way."

"Whatever you wish. You are perfect to me regardless of the length of your hair."

"Then you won't mind if I shave it completely? Go bald?"

Hannibal cannot hide his wince. Will giggles and turns to face him, bubbles blossoming from his hair like a halo of white orchids.

"I'm joking," Will says, pressing a wet hand to Hannibal's chest. "I know how much you like to tug on my hair when I'm sucking you off."

"Will," Hannibal rasps, sliding his fingers into the hair at the nape of Will's neck. "The things your words do to me…"

Will smirks and trails his free hand down into the water. It easily finds Hannibal's cock. Hannibal jerks as Will wraps his hand around the base, lightly tugging on the throbbing flesh. "Is semen good for moisturizing skin?" Will asks, lilting voice full of faux innocence. "Maybe we should put some in the bath water. Just to be safe."

Hannibal groans and traps Will in his arms, clutching the boy to his chest as if to let go would be death (perhaps it would).

"Wicked thing," he says breathlessly. "*Aš tave myliu*."

Will whines and quickens the pace of his hand. Pleasure rolls up Hannibal's spine, hot and sharp. The sound of the water sloshing as Will jerks Hannibal's cock is obscene; it echoes off the bathroom, loud as the crack of a whip. Will begins rolling his own hips, the swell of his tiny cock catching on Hannibal's leg underneath the water.

"Will you come for me?" Hannibal asks. He pulls Will tighter against him, reveling in the feel of their wet skin gliding as they both writhe and move. "Spill your seed against my skin, massage it into me as a way to claim what is yours?"

"Yes," Will gasps. "You'll smell like me for days. No one else will know, but *I* will."

Hannibal growls and bends down to suck a bruise into Will's neck. The boy's skin tastes like bergamot and vetiver. Like spiced arousal and *Will*. Hannibal sucks harder, delighted when Will cries out and then spills into the water. His seed is thick and cloudy, mixing with the oil in the water and making it turn a murky off-white.

Will runs the pad of his finger beneath Hannibal's foreskin. He finds Hannibal's glans, then presses a wet fingertip along the sensitive skin. Hannibal shouts as he comes, his own seed mixing with Will's in the sullied bath.

Will's heaving breaths eventually begin to slow as he slumps against Hannibal, sated.

"What do you think," Will drawls. He reaches down and begins scrubbing his skin with the tainted water, semen and essential oils dissolving into the palm of his hand. "Will I be nice and soft after this?"

Hannibal feels as though he might pass out against the side of the bath. Will's sheer physicality—the way he has embraced his sensual nature and then weaponized it against Hannibal—is almost too much to bear.

"You will be the death of me, darling," Hannibal says, voice rough and low. He scoops the cloudy water up and washes the remaining shampoo from Will's curls. No one else but Hannibal will be able to smell the faint traces of salt and musk in the boy's hair, but that does not matter. No one but Hannibal should ever be close enough to smell it, regardless. Will giggles when Hannibal presses a delicate kiss to the tip of his nose, then practically falls asleep as Hannibal applies conditioner into his curls and finishes washing them both.

Hannibal takes extra time drying their bodies. Each pass of the soft navy towel against Will's sun-kissed skin is an apology, each press of his lips against the boy a type of worship. Hannibal easily lifts Will into his arms and carries the boy to their bed, wrapping him in blankets like one would nestle a priceless pearl in silk. More kisses are pressed to Will's head, his cheeks, the gentle slope of his neck. By the time Hannibal lets Winston out into the yard and then brings the confused dog back to their bedroom, Will is fast asleep.

Hannibal smiles, something small and private, and sets his alarm for 4:45, only a few hours away. Hannibal is lucky he does not require more than a few hours of sleep, otherwise Chiyoh would be making the trip from the airplane to their house inside of a rental car.

"Do not stray," Hannibal tells Winston, pointing with a firm finger at the dog bed. Winston lets out a soft *woof* and plops down onto the memory foam mattress, tail giving a few wags as he sniffs at his new velvet-lined bed.

Hannibal falls asleep with his arms wrapped around Will.

He wakes to the sound of his blaring alarm and Will plastered on top of his chest.

Delicately—and with no little consternation—Hannibal moves Will so that the boy is lying on his own pillow rather than using Hannibal's pectorals. Hannibal strokes his hand through Will's luscious curls for a moment, then two, then forces himself to leave.

On the way to pick up Chiyoh, Hannibal makes several phone calls. Despite the earliness of the hour, each of his calls is answered in a perfunctory manner.

"Hello," Hannibal greets his attorney. "I need to hire a private investigator. Someone has been following me and photographing the movements of me and my son. Across the globe, I

might add."

Hannibal's attorney does not bat an eye. There is a reason Hannibal hired them, after all. They automatically agree to hire someone discreet to trail behind Hannibal. Someone who will find the unwanted photographer and bring them to heel.

The second call Hannibal makes is to a security company that Hannibal's uncle used in the past for large events.

"I want my house guarded at all times," Hannibal tells the representative, a woman with a smoke-filled voice that curls into his ear. "My son and I must be under constant watch. We have another property in Wolf Trap, Virginia. I wish for that property to be guarded as well." Hannibal has already put a moratorium on his hunts; he might as well reap the benefits of keeping a law-abiding schedule by having a full-time security team.

Hannibal reaches the airport tired but pleased. If someone is coming for him and Will, at least he will be prepared. His blackmailer has underestimated him.

It will be the last mistake they ever make.

Chiyoh exits the private jet unruffled as ever. She is wearing a smart blazer, wool trousers, and a sensible pair of black shoes. Her only luggage is a small duffle bag thrown over her right shoulder.

"Chiyoh," Hannibal says. His voice is nearly carried away by the cool morning wind. "I am delighted to see you."

Chiyoh raises a single eyebrow and walks with Hannibal to his Bentley. "I wasn't sure my welcome would be so warm. Especially after how we last parted."

Hannibal sighs and rolls his shoulders. "We discussed this over the phone. You did what you thought was best. I disagreed. Will was hurt. You have promised that Will will never be harmed by your hand again. I hope you can prove your loyalty by keeping my beloved safe while I am away during the week."

Chiyoh nods and tucks her bag into the trunk of the car. She goes to the passenger seat and gracefully slides inside. "I…feel awful about what occurred. Even though I wished to follow Murasaki's order, I never wished to harm your Will. He is more delicate than I imagined. At least his wrist is. I miscalculated my strength. For that, I will never forgive myself."

Hannibal starts the car and turns to face Chiyoh. "I forgive you. I hope in time you forgive yourself. Neither of us are without fault in regards to Will."

Chiyoh hums and tucks a strand of long black hair behind her ear. "Tell me more about this blackmailer of yours. I want to know every detail, no matter how minute."

Chiyoh stares at Will.

Will stares back.

“This is awkward,” Will says.

“It is only awkward if you make it so,” Chiyoh primly replies, sniffing in a way near-identical to Hannibal. Will wants to laugh at the familiar motion, but it comes out as an aborted cough, one that ends with his face red and his eyes watering.

“I think awkward is all I know how to be,” Will finally admits once he can breathe again.

“It is a symptom of your age.”

“I think it’s a symptom of being me,” Will sighs. He slumps against the leather chair in front of the fireplace and glances into the empty hearth. “What are we supposed to do until Hannibal returns?”

“That is up to you. You are my master here. I serve the Lecters.”

Will frowns and chews on his bottom lip. “I don’t like that. Can we just be friends instead?”

Chiyoh’s head jerks back. Will forces himself to look into her endless brown eyes and read the emotions he finds there.

This boy continues to surprise me. Does he not hate me for what I have done? I must keep him safe. Hannibal would skin me alive if not, though I would want to keep him safe regardless. He reminds me so much of Mischa…

“I’m not mad,” Will says. “About my wrist.”

Chiyoh’s shoulders are tense as she begins pacing the office. “You say that, but grudges have a way of harboring just beneath the skin. They pull and tug like fishhooks until you cannot move without being pricked.”

Will tilts his head back to stare at the vast ceiling. “Maybe. But I’m not one to hold grudges. That’s more of a...Hannibal thing to do.”

“That it is.”

They sit in silence, though this one is much more companionable than the last. Winston walks over to Will and nudges his hand, black eyes flashing with sympathy.

“I heard you are training it to be a guard dog,” Chiyoh says. She walks to the piano bench and sits on the edge, eyes locked on Winston.

Will laughs, but it is more melancholy than anything else. “You and Hannibal are the same. Winston is a he, not an *it*. And yes, I’ve been training him. He’s smarter than me.”

“I highly doubt it. I…have some skill in training the dogs on the Lecter property. Would you care to show me what you have taught it—him so far? Perhaps I can help teach Winston some new commands as well.”

Will nods, relieved to have something to do other than stare at Chiyoh's pointed chin for the rest of the day until Hannibal returns. He walks out of the office and into the kitchen, opening the French doors to let himself and Winston into the backyard.

"Where does Winston come from?" Chiyoh asks, following closely behind. Will has not been out of her sight once today; she even tried to stand outside of the bathroom while Will went, and when he opened the door to find her there with an unreadable expression on her face and her hands clasped behind her back, Will had told her that if someone tried to kidnap while he was taking a piss then they were welcome to do so.

She stopped standing outside the bathroom door after that.

Will whistles and calls Winston to his side, petting the dog's soft head in praise when he promptly obeys. "I found Winston wandering the neighborhood. He had a rope embedded in his neck and no microchip."

"You have a penchant for strays."

Will snorts and commands Winston to sit. "Something like that."

The next hour is spent going over each of the commands that Will has taught Winston so far. Some newer orders, like *bark*, are still met with a sassy expression from Winston before he eventually obeys.

"You have a gift," Chiyoh praises. The words flow through Will like melted molasses, warming his body from the tip of his head down to his toes. "Winston is intelligent, but it takes a special hand to mold the mind of another. Has he been taught how to bite?"

Will shakes his head. "Hannibal is…nervous about me teaching Winston to be violent. Winston knows to alert me if a stranger comes inside, but not to attack them."

"Circumstances have changed. I'm sure Hannibal would be grateful for another sharp mouth to protect his beloved."

Will flushes at the word *beloved* coming from Chiyoh (though he knows she is merely quoting Hannibal, and that thought makes his heart flutter) and gestures for her to stand in front of Winston. "I think Hannibal might like it better if you taught Winston to attack since you have the experience. And the spare limbs," Will jokes.

"Very well." Chiyoh gives Will a small smile and takes out the bag of bacon bits.

Chiyoh is an excellent trainer. Will watches with awe as Chiyoh masterfully teaches Winston to bite on command, to sink his teeth deep into the rubber toys Will has sacrificed to the cause.

Once Winston has mastered how to bite when given a signal, Chiyoh pieces together the commands to bark and bite, one right after the other.

"This would work better if he had actual flesh to tear into," Chiyoh mentions, casual, as if discussing the weather later in the day rather than training Winston how to kill a human in a

matter of seconds. “Rubber is a poor excuse for flesh and bone.”

Will’s mind wanders down to the basement. To the freezer stocked with frozen arms and sawed-off legs. “I have an idea. But Hannibal has to give me permission. I’m not allowed to take meat out of the freezer without asking him first.”

Chiyoh pauses, looks to Will with wide, shocked eyes. “Hannibal lets you in the basement at all?”

“Well yeah. How else am I supposed to help him harvest the meat? We can’t do it upstairs, it’s far too messy and all of the saws and tools need to be kept somewhere sterile.” Will knows the reason she is shocked (though why should she be? Hannibal shares everything with Will, of course he would share this) and uses his youthful face to garner sympathy as he is purposefully obtuse. “The Persian rug in Hannibal’s office is handmade, did you know? We would never get the blood out of it.”

Chiyoh is silent for a moment. Then, like roiling clouds parting in the sky to reveal the sun, she begins to laugh. It’s a full-bellied laugh, the kind that brings tears to the eyes and a flush to the cheeks.

“Oh my *god*,” she laughs, wiping at the corner of her eyes. “You really are his perfect companion.”

Will beams.

It is only a few minutes later that Hannibal comes home. Will and Chiyoh have spent the entire afternoon outside in the backyard, and they return to the house with cold noses and red hands. Winston’s fur is looking particularly haggard, and Will already knows the poor dog is in for a long bath this evening.

“Hannibal!” Will cries. He runs to his love with outstretched arms, easily swept up in Hannibal’s embrace. The older man peppers kisses over Will’s face, little pecks that tingle and sting like Will has been swimming and brushed against a jellyfish. By the time Hannibal sets Will back down, Will is breathing heavily and full-to-bursting with happiness (and, of course, arousal, for there is hardly any time when he is in Hannibal's presence and not aroused).

“Darling,” Hannibal greets. His own face is beaming. Will loves Hannibal like this; eyes crinkled at the corners, crooked teeth on display from his smile, hair mussed from Will’s wandering hands. The man has never looked more beautiful, and Will’s heart stutters just from a single glance. “How has your day transpired? I hope Chiyoh has proved adequate company?”

“Chiyoh is helping me train Winston. She says it would work better if he could bite into actual flesh. Can we use some of the arms or legs frozen in the basement?”

Hannibal blinks. Slowly. His face is completely blank as he processes this information. Will finds it fascinating that Hannibal’s default is to show no emotion at all; only when he has decided on a proper response does he let something break through the person suit. Unless, of

course, he is completely swept away by Will (as he so often is). Only then are his emotions real. Unfiltered. Will loves those moments, loves watching Hannibal's carefully-crafted suit fall apart at the seams simply from a glance or look. Will can control Hannibal's emotions like a puppeteer who holds all the strings. It is both a heady and terrifying to think about.

"You want to…feed Winston some of our long pig?" Hannibal eventually asks.

"Not feed him. Well, not *just* feed him. He will train better on real human limbs, right? This is the perfect way to teach him how to bite. Who else gets to teach their guard dog what human tastes like before they actually fight?"

"Only you, Mylimasis," Hannibal says, fond. "Only you. Very well, I suppose there is no use arguing on the matter."

Chiyoh walks into the front entryway then, face blank. Will can read her amusement, though, along with an undercurrent of anxiety. "The boy is tenacious, I will give him that. He has not complained once despite the long hours of our day."

Hannibal preens like a damned peacock. "Will is an exceptional specimen of humanity. A veritable diamond in the rough, as they say."

Will rolls his eyes and gently prods Hannibal toward the kitchen. "Yes, yes, we all know how amazing you think I am. Neither me nor Chiyoh need to hear it."

Hannibal simply smiles, placid and benign, and opens the hidden door in the pantry that leads to the basement. He goes down to collect the body parts being sacrificed to Winston. Will stays upstairs with Chiyoh and begins to prepare dinner.

"Hannibal has been teaching me how to cook for a few months now," Will says. "Do you… share our diet? We have actual pork if not. Oh, and some trout I caught a few weeks ago. Which would you prefer?"

Again, though Chiyoh's face remains perfectly blank, Will can read the emotion roiling underneath with ease. "I do not mind your…diet. Hannibal and I have hunted together before."

Will smiles and rolls up his sleeves. "Great! Let's have kidney pie. There's a kidney in the fridge that needs to be used before it goes bad. Hannibal and I both hate wasting food."

"You both grew up in households where food was scarce and hunger plentiful. It changes a person."

Will's smile drops. His mind spins, churns over memories that he has tried to bury, to cover with more pleasant images and recollections.

Will, abdomen distended, clawing his way towards the base of a large magnolia tree. He can't remember the last time he ate. The last time something other than tepid water filled the gaping hole inside of him. Everything is fuzzy. Everything hurts. Somewhere in the distance, the creek he calls home is flowing merrily, completely oblivious to his suffering.

He isn't sure how he makes it to the tree, but he does, lying beneath the broad leaves with his back on the dirt and his eyes cast toward the heavens.

It's been over a year since his father abandoned him…he thinks. Time is different out here. There's days, and seasons, but Will isn't tracking them, and nature does not run on the same clock as man.

Will thinks he might die.

It's not the first time he's had this thought, but it is the most certain he's felt while thinking it. He has no strength left in his bones, no drive to get up and fight. All he can focus on is the gnawing emptiness that has taken over where his stomach once sat.

The sun shifts in the sky. Night falls.

The rats come out to hunt.

Will hears them scurrying amongst the dry grass and fallen leaves. They chitter and squeak. One, braver than the rest (stupider than the rest) deems Will to not be a threat and comes to investigate. Will glances at it from the corner of his eye, too tired even to turn his head. He wonders if this is to be his fate, to be eaten alive by rodents.

The rat gets closer. It climbs onto his torso, begins crawling up to his neck.

With strength he didn't know he possessed, Will lifts up his hand and grabs *. His fingers dig into the soft flesh of the rodent. He brings the wriggling rat up to his face. He stares into its beady black eyes.*

He bites.

Blood, hot and salty, floods onto his tongue. Bones crunch beneath his teeth. Fur caresses his gums and is promptly swallowed.

It's the most delicious thing Will has ever tasted in his life.

"Will?" Chiyoh's face swims into Will's vision. She is openly concerned, kneeling down in the kitchen so that her face is level with his. One of her slim hands grasps Will's shoulder. The other rests by her side curled into a loose fist.

"Sorry." His voice is light. Breathy. Insubstantial. It's how Will feels at that moment, pulled apart and cast to the wind.

"Do not apologize. Memories are a vicious thing. They can drown you if you let them. I am just glad to see you present once more."

Will gives Chiyoh a weak smile and turns to the fridge. "We should get started on dinner. It will take a few hours to prepare and cook. Especially since Hannibal refuses to buy pre-made pie crusts like a normal person." As if any part of their meals are normal.

Chiyoh nods and, blessedly, drops the subject. She helps Will grab the required ingredients, both of them jumping when Hannibal suddenly appears inside of the pantry, a wrapped limb in hand. The white butcher paper is taped tightly, the shape of the limp appearing block-like, almost like it came from a stone statute rather than an actual person. Hannibal looks to Chiyoh, then Will, then back to Chiyoh with a confused expression, nose scrunched up in a way that is rather adorable.

“We’re making kidney pie,” Will offers. “Does the limb need to thaw out before we can use it to train Winston?”

“Yes,” Hannibal says. “I will set it in the fridge. Perhaps all three of us can work with Winston tomorrow.”

“I’d like that,” Will says quietly. “Will you help us with dinner?”

“Of course, darling.”

It’s different, having three people in the kitchen instead of two. Will has grown familiar with his and Hannibal’s routine, the way they dance around each other in the large space, the steps they take and the way they balance one another while working. Chiyoh is a surprise, but a welcome one.

Hannibal makes the crust, Will chops the vegetables, and Chiyoh works on the side dishes—fresh snow peas and dauphinoise potatoes. When the food is finished cooking, Hannibal plates the dishes while Will sets the table and Chiyoh fetches some wine for her and Hannibal to share. The kitchen is warm from the oven. Winston waits at the edge of the room with sharp eyes and a thin line of drool hanging from his mouth.

It feels like family.

Will thinks he could grow used to it.

After dinner, the three of them go upstairs to the attic. Will demonstrates to Chiyoh some of the instruments he is learning how to play. Chiyoh delights him by picking up the guitar and plucking out a short song. It’s sad, melancholy. It matches the darkness outside, the enclosing darkness of a winter night, and Will shivers when she is done. She gives him a smile when he breaks out in applause.

“A most attentive audience,” she praises. “I could get used to this.”

“You should,” Will blurts out. “You should stay. I like…I like you being here with us.”

Chiyoh’s face softens as she sets the guitar back into its stand. “I appreciate the sentiment Will, but I have promised to serve another.”

Hannibal comes behind Will and wraps him in his arms, large biceps trapping Will against Hannibal’s warm, broad chest. “Perhaps one day,” he says. Will can feel the vibration of his voice. It travels down Will’s body and fills him with a low, simmering heat.

“Perhaps,” Chiyoh echoes.

That night as Will lies, stated, at Hannibal's side, he cannot help but ask, "How did Chiyoh come to serve your family?"

Hannibal shifts so that he is facing Will, both of their heads lying on the same pillow. Will can feel Hannibal's breath blowing across his face. It is warm, comforting, a familiar weight on his face. "Murasaki is from a very…traditional family in Japan. When she was promised to my uncle as a young woman, she was given Chiyoh as a parting gift to help her with the transition. Chiyoh was a child, only eight at the time. When I came to live with my aunt and uncle, Chiyoh and I were delighted that we were the same age. She was a…balm to me, after the loss of my sister. I owe Chiyoh my life."

"I like her," Will says. "I liked her when we met back in France. I like her better here, without Murasaki's influence."

"You and I both, darling."

Will stares at Hannibal's eyes, maroon shifting to black in the darkness. "Why did you have a...physical relationship with your aunt?"

Hannibal sighs. The breath blows across Will's nose, smelling faintly of salt and musk. "Is that truly a question you want answered?"

"I wouldn't have asked if I didn't want to know the answer."

"Very well." Hannibal lifts a hand and gently runs it along the side of Will's face. "My time at the orphanage was not kind to me. I was mute. I refused to interact with the other children or the caretakers. By the time my uncle found me, I was more of a shell than an actual person. Touch was as foreign a concept to me as comfort. Murasaki was kind and patient. Beautiful in a way I had never seen before. There was no beauty in the world for me after the death of my family. She took me under her wing, showed me the finer things in life. She was one of the finer things. Something sharp wrapped in a soft skin."

"You do like beautiful things," Will whispers softly. No judgment in his tone.

"That I do, darling. It is what drew me to you from the first moment we met." Hannibal's voice is equally soft.

Will leans forward and kisses Hannibal. Hannibal's lips are pale and thin and perfect, slotting against Will's as if their mouths were made specifically to press together.

At the foot of the bed, Winston lets out a loud snore. It echoes in the room, and Will can't help but giggle (both at the sound and Hannibal's subsequent expression). Hannibal pulls Will closer to him, tucks Will's face into the crook of his neck. It's one of Will's favorite spots, a space carved out solely for him.

He wonders what he ever did to deserve such happiness. He hopes he never does anything to drive it away. Not now.

Trial of Faith

Chapter Summary

Hannibal is called to testify at Lisa's trial. Will asks Hannibal for a permanent reminder of who owns him.

“Hello?”

“Dr. Lecter? This is Agent Crawford with the FBI.”

“Ah, yes. How are you?”

“Fine, fine. Listen, are you still willing to give that character testimony? Lisa Carter’s trial will begin next week, and the prosecution would be grateful to have you on their side. Is there a time either today or tomorrow where you could come to Quantico? We want to go over your testimony before the trial starts.”

Hannibal looks down at his watch and frowns. “I work today until five, but I am free tomorrow. Could I stop by around noon, perhaps?”

“Yes, that’s fine. I’ll have someone waiting for you in the lobby with a visitor’s badge. Security is a pain in the ass, but it is what it is.”

“I am grateful the FBI is adequately protecting their agents. I will see you then.”

Hannibal hangs up his phone and looks down at the black screen, amused. Yes, the FBI *certainly* protects its employees...by allowing a serial killer like Hannibal to walk through the door, invited, and with a visitor badge. It brings a smile to Hannibal’s face. The irony of it all is sweeter than even a sip of his favorite port.

“Is there something funny, Dr. Lecter?”

Hannibal puts his phone back into his pocket. He straightens his shoulders, turns, and looks down at Dr. Heimlich’s balding head. “An acquaintance of mine just called. Is everything ready for our next session?”

“It will be, once you are no longer distracted. A psychiatrist thrives on having a clear mind. I never allow myself to call or text in-between appointments.”

“How fortunate you must be, then, that your acquaintances are so willing to go without speaking to you for hours on end.”

Dr. Heimlich *humphs* and goes to open the door that leads to their shared office. The office itself is large and tastefully decorated—something which Dr. Heimlich did not have any say in, Hannibal is sure. The walls are painted a muted blue, the floor is covered by a thick beige rug, and there are several couches and chairs for the patients to choose from. In the corner, a crackling fire keeps the worst of the chill at bay, though with spring just beginning, the fire will soon no longer be needed.

One of their newer patients strolls into the room. He is a scrawny man, twitchy and nervous in a way that makes Hannibal want to stitch the man's fingers closed, bolt his feet to the floor so they cannot pace about the room in such a ridiculous manner. The man scampers to the seat furthest from both psychiatrists and twists his fingers together without looking up from his scuffed shoes.

"Jonathan," Dr. Heimlich greets. "How was your week?"

"Oh, f–fine." Jonathan's brown eyes continue to remain fixed on the floor.

"Have you settled into your apartment? During our last session, you mentioned your landlord was rather…overbearing."

"She's, uh, she's…fine."

Hannibal glances to the large window behind Jonathan and tunes out the conversation. It is the last session of the day, and he is more than eager to return home to Will and Chiyoh.

It is strange; Hannibal expected Chiyoh's presence to cause friction between him and Will. He expected to feel wary of having someone else in their home, someone else in their lives. Lives which, up until now, had been quite solitary save for themselves (something both Hannibal and Will appreciated). Instead, Hannibal is glad that Chiyoh is staying with them. Will is no longer alone during the day when Hannibal is busy with work. He is protected. He has…a friend?

The thought tugs at Hannibal, pulls like a loose string. Hannibal is a selfish beast. He never intended to share Will with anyone. However, if Will is happier with Chiyoh, then who is Hannibal to deny the boy?

"What do you think, Dr. Lecter?"

Hannibal turns to face Jonathan and sees a flash of something in the man's wide eyes. Something dark. Cunning. Not at all like the weak, trembling thing he presents to the outside world. It would seem, Hannibal muses, that Jonathan is not all that he appears to be.

Well, this day certainly just became much more interesting.

"I think we could learn a great deal from Jonathan," Hannibal responds. "Tell us more about your current occupation. You mentioned you are an artist?"

"Yes, that's right."

"What mediums do you work in?"

“Oh, all sorts. Painting with acrylic and watercolor. Photography. Wood burning, when I’m in the mood. I enjoy dipping my fingers into a little bit of everything.”

Hannibal imagines Jonathan’s fingers dipped into blood. A canvas smeared with crimson, then hung alongside a drained body. Jack Crawford’s horrified face as he realizes Baltimore is home to yet another monster.

Yes, an interesting day indeed.

The rest of the session continues quickly enough, and Hannibal eagerly bids farewell to Doctor Heimlich, then walks to his car with long strides.

At home, Hannibal is greeted by…no one.

The living room is empty, the kitchen as well. Winston is not lying on his dog bed in the office, Will is not working on his schoolwork at the desk. Upstairs, the guest room where Chiyoh sleeps is perfectly clean; besides the lingering trace of perfume in the air, Hannibal would not know that anyone was staying in the room at all. His and Will’s bedroom is equally bereft of clues, though there is a pile of dirty clothes lying on the ground by the bathroom rather than being placed into the hamper in the closet (Hannibal cannot do anything but smile; though the disarray should make him upset, it is a reminder of Will and the life they share together). Hannibal sighs, picks up the clothing, and places them into the proper hamper, allowing himself to smell the dried sweat that lingers in the fabric, a low hum of arousal curling in Hannibal’s gut from the familiar scent.

In the attic, all of the instruments are in their proper places. On the piano, a few sheets of music rest on the shelf above the ivory keys. Hannibal idly runs his hand over the lid, closes it, then goes back downstairs.

“Hello?” he calls out, feeling rather foolish. The yard is barren, a mere hint of green peeking up among the dead grass, the smell of spring crisp in the air. The security team Hannibal has hired to watch the house is nowhere to be seen.

Good. That means they are doing their job well.

Hannibal brings out his phone and checks for any messages or missed calls from Chiyoh. There are none, though there is a text from Dr. Chilton asking for Hannibal’s opinion on an article he recently published (and how Frederick ever managed to gain the number for Hannibal’s personal cell, he is not certain, but he relishes the day he can “lose” his phone, change his number, and never speak to the odious man again). Hannibal rolls his eyes and clicks on Chiyoh’s contact information, bringing up her number. He taps it, listening as the phone rings. And rings. And rings. Finally, a brief voicemail.

Frowning, Hannibal tries again. When there is no response, Hannibal begins to panic. There is an unknown person following Hannibal and Will across the globe, taking compromising photos of them, and Chiyoh has one job, which is to *protect Will*. How she can do that job when she disappears along with Will (without telling Hannibal where either of them have gone) is lost on him.

Hannibal curses and begins sending messages to the security team at Wolf Trap. Perhaps Chiyoh had taken Will and Winston hiking around the property and her phone lost reception; it is not implausible. Wolf Trap is not exactly known for its technological development.

The lead for the security team answers Hannibal's call in a gruff voice. She reports that no one has visited the property the entire day. Hannibal, now slipping from panic into distress, thanks her for the update and hangs up the phone.

His phone is gently placed onto the kitchen countertop. His breathing is steady, even. On the outside, Hannibal looks completely at ease.

It is a complete lie.

Hannibal cannot remember the last time he felt like this. Like his throat was slowly closing, his oxygen supply narrowing into a tiny sliver that scarcely filled his lungs. Never before has the blood pooled so quickly into the base of his stomach, leaving his hands and toes tingling from a lack of circulation. He feels lightheaded, dizzy with worry. It takes everything in his power to remain standing upright.

Quickly, Hannibal goes through the security footage for the front door and garage. Around noon, Chiyoh drove away with Will and Winston in her Porsche. All three look normal in the grainy video. Fine.

That was over six hours ago.

Hannibal wants to race to the garage, get into his car, and drive away as fast as he can. But to where? For what purpose? With no destination, Hannibal would be driving aimlessly through a city of half a million people.

There is nothing he can do but wait.

Hannibal grits his teeth and alerts both his security teams to be on the lookout for Will and Chiyoh. His private investigator is also alerted, though Hannibal doubts the man will be of much help; at the moment, he is off in Georgia tracking down a lead.

"Damn it Will," Hannibal chokes out. "If you do not return home to me, there *will* be a reckoning."

Unable to do anything else, Hannibal decides to cook dinner. What is normally a calm, enjoyable task is turned into a nightmare without Will by his side. Hannibal has his phone's volume turned up to the highest setting. He is constantly plagued by the false sound of a new message, only to realize it is all in his imagination. He nearly burns the $700 worth of lobster boiling on the stove while staring at the blank black screen of his phone.

Seven o'clock passes without a word. Thirty minutes later, the lobster is done boiling and Hannibal takes it off the stove, sets the empty table, and forces himself to sit at his usual chair (as if following his normal routine will force Will to appear out of thin air to partake in the routine with him).

By the time eight o'clock rolls around, Hannibal is a trembling mess. He cannot bear to be sitting, so he paces the length of the house, from the front door all the way to the living room. Each footstep echoes along the empty halls. In his pocket, Hannibal's phone remains silent, a black void that consumes every waking moment.

At forty minutes past eight, there's a noise from the garage. Hannibal shoots up from where he's been sitting—perching, really—in front of the fireplace and runs down the hall. Hannibal cannot remember ever running before inside his house. It's a novel experience, one he hopes never to replicate.

From behind the closed door, Hannibal hears the clear sound of Will's laughter. It is a balm to his soul, an instant remedy to the frantic pace of his heart. Hannibal steels himself, takes a deep breath, then opens the garage door.

"Oh, hi!" Will chirps. He barrels into Hannibal's torso, arms immediately coming up to wrap around his waist. "Sorry we're late, Winston got covered in mud, and we knew you'd want him washed before we came home! Did you know there are spas for *dogs*. I didn't know there were spas for humans until I met you. And then I got hungry, so Chiyoh let me stop and get some ice cream. Are you mad? I know you don't like it when I eat out. I'm sorry. Please don't be mad."

Hannibal's head is spinning, though this time from confusion instead of fear. "I am…not upset. Where did you go?"

"To the park, then to the dog spa, then to Dairy Queen." Will pulls away from Hannibal's waist. He smells of crisp spring air, of sweet milk, of worn flannel and wet dog. His curls are windswept, messy. His cheeks are bright pink from the cold. The corner of his lip is smeared with chocolate. Not an inch of him looks harmed.

Hannibal's shoulders loosen. Chiyoh walks through the door, Winston trailing behind.

Hannibal's shoulders immediately tense back up.

"Chiyoh," he greets. Hannibal is sure there have been corpses with warmer, welcoming appearances.

Chiyoh stops, closes the door, and slowly turns to face Hannibal. "Hello," she says. Her face is perfectly blank. Not a single hair is out of place. Her dark eyes scan Hannibal's face, taking in the harsh line of his mouth, the jut of his jaw. She stiffens her spine and says, "My phone fell into the lake while I was attempting to retrieve Winston. I am sorry that I did not think to leave a note to explain our absence. We did not plan to be out so late."

"And yet you were," Hannibal says. "I have waited here, in this empty house, for hours. Not knowing if you still lived and breathed. There are two security teams assigned to Will, yet neither were able to vouch for his safety. What were you *thinking* Chiyoh. This is not a game. You could have cost me…" Will. His beloved. "Everything."

To her credit, Chiyoh continues to remain unfazed. "We are both safe, Hannibal. The fault lies with me, and I accept the blame wholeheartedly. However, do not think I take my

responsibility over Will's safety lightly. He was with me and Winston the entire time. Nothing will happen to him, not while I am here."

"You cannot guarantee such a thing," Hannibal grits out.

Something tugs on his hand. Hannibal looks down to find Will peering up at him, his blue eyes wide and solemn. He clutches Will's hand inside of his own, tiny fingers wrapping tight to him, and Hannibal feels every ounce of anger in his body melting away.

"Please," Will begs. "Really, it was a simple accident. We won't go out again without letting you know. We won't go out all if it will make you upset. I don't want you to be upset."

"I'm not," Hannibal says. "Not with you."

"And not with Chiyoh?"

Hannibal gazes at Will, wind-swept and the picture of health and beauty. "No, not with Chiyoh either."

Will's grin could soften even the hardest of hearts. "Good. Now can we eat whatever lobster dish you made for dinner? I could smell it the moment we walked inside."

While Chiyoh and Will clean up from their…adventure, Hannibal notifies both security teams that everyone is safe and the teams should resume their normal duties. Hannibal washes his hands and plates the lobster tail along with the spinach and quinoa salad with dried apricots. The table is lovely, each dish steaming and expertly presented. Even the centerpiece matches, with the red carnations hidden among the cattle skull matching the bright shell of the lobster.

For once in his life, Hannibal is not hungry.

The emotional upheaval of the evening has completely destroyed his appetite. He sits at the head of the table, Will to his right, Chiyoh to his left (Winston at the edge of the room, a trail of drool hanging from his upper lip) and delicately cuts his dinner into small pieces. He swipes the lobster through the white wine and lemon sauce. He creates patterns with the spinach and quinoa. He presses his cup to his lips and pretends to sip.

Will keeps up a steady stream of conversation, but those intelligent eyes do not miss Hannibal's farce. When Will and Chiyoh have cleared their plates, Will walks up to Hannibal and climbs into his lap, their apparent audience ignored.

"Why aren't you eating?" he whispers. He looks ethereal among the low lighting of the kitchen, his thick lashes casting intricate shadows over his cheekbones, his lips red and shining from the meal, his body lean and lithe as it perches on Hannibal's thighs. "Are you really not upset? You never skip a meal."

"I am not upset," Hannibal confirms. "Merely…overwhelmed." He grips Will's waist, pleased with the plush skin that sinks beneath his fingertips. "I feared the worst, Mylimasis. The fear that I was plagued by…I have not felt such a thing in many, many years."

Will frowns and lets out a small whine. “Oh Hannibal, I’m so sorry. Really, it’s all my fault. I asked Chiyoh to go get Winston out of the water. If I hadn’t done that, she wouldn’t have dropped her phone and none of this would have happened.”

Hannibal shushes the boy and draws him closer. He presses his hand to the nape of Will’s neck, tucks Will into the crook of his shoulder. “Hush, darling. This is no more your fault than the water’s.” Hannibal begins rocking Will from side to side, listening to the steady beat of his pulse beneath Hannibal’s hands. “I wish I could meld our bodies together, suture our hearts so that one cannot beat without the other.”

“I feel like they already are.” Will’s voice is featherlight, a ghost of sound glancing over Hannibal’s skin. He shivers at the sensation and pulls Will even tighter against him.

Hannibal stands, lifting Will with him. He carries the boy upstairs, uncaring if Chiyoh sees them or not. When Hannibal gets to their bedroom, he sets Will onto the bed and climbs on top of him, effectively barricading the boy’s tiny body with his own.

“Hannibal,” Will says, breathless. His pupils are dilated, and his hands are harsh and demanding where they claw at Hannibal’s suit.

“Shall I fill you, beloved?”

“*Yes*.” Will tips his head back, exposing the pale column of his throat. Hannibal immediately bends down and latches onto the unmarked skin. His lips press first to the underside of Will’s jaw, then follow a path to the sharp cut of his collarbone. Hannibal bites into the bone, teeth sinking though the flesh until sweet blood paints his lips.

“Delicious,” Hannibal growls. He licks up the droplets of blood that spring from the fresh wound. They slide into his stomach and warm it from the inside out. Will is writhing by this point, high-pitched cries that sing through Hannibal’s mind like an arrow piercing his skull.

He continues biting marks until not an inch of Will’s throat is left unmarred. There is crimson welling up from the imprints of Hannibal’s teeth and the faint purple of new bruises. Hannibal kisses the marks, then carefully strips Will of his flannel shirt and jeans. Underneath, Will is wearing a cream-colored panty and bralette set, one that follows the curves of his smooth flesh and brings out the sun-kissed tan of his arms and legs.

“I…I have an idea,” Will says. Hannibal can barely hear the boy over the pounding of his heartbeat, the rush of arousal singing in his blood, the harsh pants of breath in his ears. “Could you…I mean…”

“Go on, darling.” Hannibal's voice sounds wrecked already. “Whatever you want, it’s yours.”

“I want you to mark me.”

Hannibal peers down at the countless bite marks littering the boy’s neck and quirks an eyebrow. “More?”

“Permanently,” Will says.

Hannibal's heart stops. He wants—so badly, more than he has wanted anything in so long—to do as Will asks.

But…

"Are you sure?"

Will has the audacity to roll his eyes. Hannibal thinks he cannot love the boy more than he does in this moment. "Yes, *mon coeur*. I wouldn't ask unless I meant it."

"Then it is yours."

Will's entire body feels like it is being consumed by flames. His neck burns and stings from Hannibal's bites. His chest is on fire; he cannot get enough air even as he sucks in breath after breath. Hannibal's eyes are so intense, Will feels he might spontaneously combust from a single glance.

"Your scalpel," Will croaks. "I want…" He licks his lips, tries again. "I want you to carve your initials into my skin."

Hannibal lets out a low, keening sound. If Will didn't know any better, he would say it sounded pained rather than pleasured. Like the man was drowning in agony. Will smiles at Hannibal and grasps at Hannibal's chin. He wraps his thin fingers around it, drags it down so that Hannibal's blood-stained lips are hovering a mere inch above his own.

"Now," he commands.

Hannibal nods and slips from Will's grasp. He goes into their bathroom and fetches the supplies they will need—alcohol, gauze, and of course, the scalpel—before returning to Will. Hannibal quickly and efficiently strips off his own clothing, throwing them to the floor without a second glance.

"Where are you going to do it?" Will asks. He removes his own panties and bra slowly, luxuriating in the way the silky fabric slides against his arms and legs as he takes them off. He loves the feel of the satin against his skin throughout the day; before Hannibal, Will's clothes (if he was lucky enough to have any other than tattered scraps) were also so rough. Worn. Being able to wear something as soft as the lingerie that Hannibal buys him fills Will with such a sense of love. He feels…cherished, somehow, with the careful way Hannibal wraps him in silk and satin. Wearing the lingerie underneath his regular clothes makes Will feel bold in a way that he now never has to go without.

"Would you like to guess?" Hannibal asks. His voice is a whisper, a puff of warm air against Will's cheek.

"My heart," Will immediately replies. He does not hesitate; he can see Hannibal's design written in his maroon eyes, a poem of blood and adoration that Will easily reads. "You are going to carve your initials over my heart."

“Brilliant boy.” Hannibal leans down and licks at the seam of Will’s lips. Will allows him, lazily kissing back, enjoying the heat that radiates off of Hannibal’s body as it stays perched over Will.

Eventually, Hannibal pulls back. He opens an alcohol wipe and rubs it to the left of Will’s nipple. The alcohol is cold, a piece of ice pressed against his heated skin. Will hisses at the contact, then rolls his eyes at Hannibal’s smug smirk.

After the alcohol wipe, Hannibal picks up the scalpel and begins inspecting Will’s skin like an artist inspecting a new stretch of canvas; is it thick enough, will it hold a mark, will the crimson look good placed here, where the canvas is white as snow, or perhaps should the red be painted somewhere else.

“Please,” Will begs. He forces himself to stay still, to allow Hannibal to see that he truly wants this (he does). “I’m ready. I’ve been ready since the moment you stole me and took me home.”

Hannibal looks at Will, eyes dripping blood. Will shivers and arches his back.

With sure, steady hands, Hannibal brings the scalpel down to Will’s chest. The silver blade catches on the light. Shines. There’s a moment, a breath of anticipation where the blade is poised over Will’s skin, unmoving.

Hannibal makes the first cut.

It burns. It stings. Will moans and throws back his head, aching and trembling and so aroused he can hardly breathe. His skin feels too tight, his muscles threatening to pop the seams of his joints and spill out over the bed.

Above him, Hannibal looks feral. Eyes glinting, blood smeared on his fingertips and mouth, teeth poking through his lips in a permanent snarl. Will whines and waits, heartbeat fluttering, for the next cut.

This mark hurts more than the last. Perhaps it is the placement—right on top of his rib cage—or because Will is already bleeding, droplets trailing down his side and onto the comforter below. Perhaps it is the pain flaring from the previous fresh wound or the lack of build-up. Either way, this cut hurts worse than the last.

Will comes.

His cock spurts, a flood of seed spilling onto his trembling abdomen. Will moans weakly and remains lying on the bed. His head is hazy. Everything seems to spin, dance, Hannibal’s face swimming in and out of his vision as if from a dream.

Will feels the last three cuts as though from far away. His spent cock rallies as soon as Hannibal lays aside the scalpel and begins lapping up the fresh blood with his tongue over and over, the slick texture of Hannibal’s tongue a consistent pain that burns into pleasure as it slides over Will’s wounds.

When the cuts are bleeding slowly, sluggishly, Hannibal pulls away and stares at Will. His entire mouth is smeared with blood. It drips down his chin, spills onto his neck as though the scalpel had slit his throat instead of Will's chest. The blood on his mouth is interspersed with Will's seed, white and viscous, a painting of cream and crimson.

"Please," Will whimpers. His voice is airy. So light he can barely hear it.

Hannibal lets out a near-inhuman growl. He grips Will's thighs, tight, and lifts them into the air without any effort. Before Will can think, can breathe, Hannibal bends down and licks into Will's hole. It's wet. Messy. The semen and blood are smeared onto his rim, then pushed inside through the force of Hannibal's thrusts alone.

Hannibal's tongue is powerful, violent in its attack. Will is systematically broken apart and then reassembled under Hannibal's ministrations. The blood and semen are tacky. They drag along Will's inner walls, catching against the slick insides along with Hannibal's spit.

Will's cock slowly fills out again. When he feels near ready to spend, Hannibal pulls away, places Will's thighs around his waist, then shoves his shaft deep into Will's under–prepared body.

"*Fuck*!" Will screams. His body is so tight still, it feels as though Hannibal is carving him out, cutting him away, fitting himself into the very core of Will. Everything is wet and warm and still not enough. Will tightens his thighs around Hannibal, pulling him down. He licks at the blood on Hannibal's lips, tastes himself on Hannibal's tongue. Through it all, Hannibal's body is harsh as it penetrates Will over and over and over again.

"My darling. Beloved. *Will*." Hannibal sounds wrecked. Thoroughly and utterly undone. Will whines and comes again. He cannot tell where he ends and Hannibal begins. Cannot tell whether it is his own heartbeat pounding in his ear or Hannibal's. Cannot tell whether the pleasure coursing through his body is his or Hannibal's or both and god Will is coming again he can't stop coming cannot stop—

Will passes out.

When he wakes, he is surrounded by warm water and the smell of citrus. A piece of gauze rests over his heart. Hannibal rests against his back, solid and sure.

"Are you with me?" Hannibal's voice is still throaty and low.

Will shivers, snuggles closer into Hannibal's arms. "Yes, I'm with you."

"Good boy."

Will shivers again. "When can I see it? My mark?"

"I'll take off the gauze as soon as we are finished bathing, beloved."

Will immediately stands. His head spins, and his knees tremble, threaten to give out beneath his weight. Hannibal chuckles behind him and stands as well. The water is drained, both of

their bodies dried beneath fluffy towels. Will stands in front of the mirror, impatient, fingers dancing along the edge of the thick gauze as he waits for Hannibal's permission.

"Go on," Hannibal says, amused.

Will rips off the bandage. He gasps at the delicate *HL* now adorning his chest. The letters are neat, each cut deep without sinking into bone. The wounds are scabbed; Will cannot wait to see them healed, to see the skin stitch back together, Hannibal's touch embedded in his body for the rest of time.

"It's beautiful," Will breathes, lightly dragging a fingertip over the wound. He sucks in a sharp breath at the pain that blossoms beneath his touch, then turns to face Hannibal.

Will's thoughts blur, blend as the pendulum in his mind swings.

He is mine. He is mine. I've never wanted anything more in my life. I cannot comprehend the emotions he spurs in me. I feel as though I am falling apart, and he is the one to pick up the pieces and stitch me back together again. How will I ever leave him ? Even a moment of separation feels as though it is ripping at my soul.

Will gasps and leans back into the cool marble of the vanity. Hannibal's maroon eyes—the eyes of a monster—watch him gleaming satisfaction.

"A new bandage, perhaps," Hannibal says.

Will nods, unable to speak.

Hannibal places a fresh bandage over Will's heart. He kisses it, nuzzles against it as they are lying side by side. Will is tired but forces himself to stay awake until Hannibal falls asleep. He wants to watch Hannibal breathe, slow and steady. Wants to watch the darkness envelop the room, a dark blanket that lays over Will and makes him burrow further into Hannibal's chest. He wants to run his hands through Hannibal's hair, feel the silky tendrils come unmoored beneath his touch, no gel or product to keep it in place.

Will thinks he could stay like this forever.

In the morning, Will and Winston spend long hours outside perfecting Winston's commands while Hannibal is away at Quantico.

"When is the trial?" Will asks, pausing for a brief moment to chew his food at the unimpressed look Hannibal sends him across the dining table.

"It begins next Wednesday." A pause. Then, "It will be an open courtroom."

Will stops chewing. His fork nearly slips from his grasp. He clenches it tighter in his hand, palm digging into the metal handle. "What does that mean?"

"It means the public is welcome to sit and watch."

Will gulps down his food, mouth suddenly dry. To watch the trial, to witness Lisa's shame… it would be the bow on top of Hannibal's present.

"Can I go?"

Hannibal smirks and pats at his mouth with a cloth napkin. "I cannot attend Wednesday, but I feel that Chiyoh would be more than happy to take you to the courtroom. If anyone asks, I have no trouble explaining that a trial is a fine learning opportunity for any young boy. My testimony will be Thursday afternoon. We can go together then."

Chiyoh does not blink at this dictation of her schedule. She merely nods and continues eating her lunch.

"What about the person sending you the pictures?" Will asks. "Will it be dangerous for us to be in public like that?"

"If my blackmailer is bold enough to attack at a guarded courthouse during a highly-publicized trial, then they will be met with Chiyoh's impeccable hand-to-hand training. Do not worry, you will never be left unguarded."

Will sighs and puts down his fork. He tugs at his earlobe, pulling at the skin until it is taut beneath his long curls. "Again, it's not *me* I'm worried about. Chiyoh can protect me. Who will be protecting you?"

Hannibal softens, eyes crinkling at the corners. "Your worry is sweet, Mylimasis, but unneeded. A member of my security detail will be at the courthouse, too. And I am more than capable of protecting myself. All will be well."

Will nods and bites down on his bottom lip, forcing himself to eat the rest of his meal.

Hannibal had said the trial was highly-publicized, but Will wasn't expecting the sheer amount of cameras and reporters lining the courtroom steps on Wednesday. Dozens, if not hundreds of people swarm about, beetle-like with their shiny black equipment and hard outer shells. Will feels…overwhelmed. Consumed by the emotions being thrown his way. He is grateful for Chiyoh's hand against his lower back as she guides him up the stairs and through security.

"Relax," she whispers into his ear.

Will snorts and plops down into an uncomfortable wooden bench inside the courtroom. "Sure. I'll just turn on my relax switch. Thanks for that."

Chiyoh rolls her eyes and flicks him on the shoulder. "I am not Hannibal; I will not hold your hand through the trial to keep you calm. If you ever wish to leave, you tell me immediately, yes?"

Will agrees and slips further into the seat. The courtroom is packed, though Will is the only person under eighteen as far as he can tell. Lisa's family sits in the far corner, eyes watering, shoulders hunched.

Will should feel bad. He should feel guilty. He framed Lisa for murder as a present for Hannibal.

All Will can feel is an open, unadulterated glee. An excitement that courses through his veins like electricity.

The judge is an austere woman with sharp cheekbones and narrow brown eyes. She sweeps into the courtroom with a billowing black robe, confidence oozing from every pore. She is the complete antithesis of Lisa, who trembles as she walks to her seat, handcuffed and stripped of her usual mask of eyeliner and lipstick. Her skin is wan, hair lank. Jail has not been kind to her.

Will hides his smirk behind a cough.

The judge clears her throat, adjusts the microphone in front of her seat, then begins. “We are here today for case number 214656, the State of Maryland versus Lisa Carter.”

Will listens. He watches.

He is *fascinated*.

There are so many moving parts in the courtroom, so many people, so many *lies*. Lisa’s defense attorney is a young gentleman full of swagger who dances in front of the podium, a performer pleased with their craft. He spins a tale of sympathy, pitting Lisa as the loyal assistant who loved her boss, who would never lift a finger against anyone let alone someone as sweet (and Will snorts at that word, for who would ever call Bedelia *sweet* if she were living) as Bedelia Du Maurier.

By the end of the day, Will is near-brimming with fascination. He can’t remember the last time he was so genuinely intrigued with another person besides Hannibal. He is excited to watch the rest of the trial, to see how the prosecution and defense weave their webs in order to trap Lisa or set her free. Will wonders, for the first time since coming to live with Hannibal, if perhaps this is something he would want to do once he is older. Sure, Hannibal is wealthy enough that Will never has to work a day in his life. But Hannibal is right in what he’s said before to Will (not that Will would ever tell him); being idle is *boring.* Will wants to work one day, though he is not fond of other people and having to interact with them. If he could be a part of something bigger though, a machine like the one he is witnessing...Perhaps this is what Will’s future holds.

Will walks out of the courtroom at the end of the day with a spring in his step. “—and that was a total cop-out, I can’t believe the judge didn’t call them on their bullshit right away.”

“Language,” Chiyoh chides, though her voice is amused rather than stern. Will ignores her comment and continues his rant even as they walk to Chiyoh’s car. Will slides into the passenger seat and waits a moment for Chiyoh to open her door before picking up his train of thought as though there hadn’t been a pause.

As they are driving away from the courthouse, Will catches something out of the corner of his eye. When asked later, he will say it is nothing more than a feeling, a flash of darkness in

the sea of bright emotions that pop and fizzle like fireworks in a midnight sky. Will turns, intrigued, and locks eyes with a man standing across the street. He looks…unassuming. Plain brown hair. Plain brown eyes. Wiry frame. A sleek black camera strung around his neck, a sleek black jacket wrapped around his arms.

It's his lips that Will catches on. Thin lips that curl up at the corners. There is something… predatory in the way his mouth is shaped. A curved crescent that sings of spilled blood. Will shivers and turns away, forgetting the entire encounter as he continues to babble about the trial and his thoughts on the proceedings.

He and Chiyoh arrive home at the same time as Hannibal. The older man talks of his day, of his endlessly aggravating mentor, of his endlessly boring patients and their endlessly boring lives (save for one, he says, though he refuses to expound further than that). Afterward, Hannibal and Will coax Chiyoh into playing a round of poker. Hannibal and Chiyoh drink far too much wine and take turns trying to trick Will's empathy with their masks. All three end up with tears in their eyes from laughing. Will thinks he's never been happier.

Of course, that is when everything goes wrong.

A Shot in the Dark

Chapter Summary

An intruder comes for Will. Hannibal and Chiyoh are left to pick up the pieces.

Four hours earlier.

“Dr. Lecter, may I speak to you for a moment?”

Hannibal looks over at Margot. She’s waiting for him outside of the office building where Dr. Heimlich practices (and Hannibal unfortunately watches). One of her arms is in a navy blue sling. The other is clenched into a fist at her side, knuckles white, brachialis muscle flexed and taut.

Should Hannibal ask Margot to wait until their next appointment to speak with him so that Dr. Heimlich is present? Yes. Would that be the correct, moral thing to do? Of course. Is that the course of action that Hannibal decides on? Absolutely not.

“Of course, Margot. I am always here to listen if you need.”

Margot stiffens her spine and gestures for Hannibal to follow her behind the trunk of an ancient pine tree. The needles are emerald-colored, dense, packed onto full branches which drape down onto the lawn, effectively hiding them from the sight of anyone still prowling around the office building.

“My brother…” Margot begins, then trails off, biting down on her bottom lip. The action instantly reminds Hannibal of Will. Margot’s eyes go distant and hazy as she stares into the distance. She refuses to look Hannibal in the face as she says, calm as can be, “I tried to have my brother killed.”

“Tried?” Hannibal asks, instantly intrigued.

“I should have waited until my arm was healed,” Margot replies blithely. The emptiness in her face makes Hannibal keenly invested in pushing, twisting, poking and prodding until Margot’s carefully constructed walls come crumbling to the ground.

“How did you do it?” Hannibal asks. He keeps his tone professional, concerned but not worried, interested but not disappointed.

“Does it matter?” Margot responds. Her eyes finally meet Hannibal’s, glacial blue and equally cutting. “It didn’t work. I think…I believe that this will be my last attempt.”

“Am I to assume, then, that there have been other attempts before this?”

Margot nods.

“I see. Your brother is a man made of flesh and blood like any other. He is held to the same laws as you and I.”

“No. Not him.”

“I am not talking about the laws of man, Margot. I am talking about the laws of nature. We all stop breathing at some point.”

Margot stares at him for a beat, then two. In the distance, a car horn blares in the parking lot.

“That would be Mason.” Margot looks down at her broken arm with near-clinical detachment. “I suppose I should be going, then.”

“Good luck, Margot. Remember, the darkest places in hell are reserved for those who, in times of great moral crisis, maintain their neutrality.”

“Did you just quote Dante at me?” There’s a spark in her voice, amusement that curls the edges of her words and makes them a shade of red rather than gray.

“I admit, I fall back on Dante for much of my inspiration in difficult times. Until I next see you again.”

Margot lingers a moment longer behind the pine tree. She sets her jaw, stiffens her shoulders, then walks out to the parking lot. Mason is leaning against a rather egregiously-priced vehicle, his own posture slouched and easy-going as he watches Margot open the door and slip into the back seat. Mason’s driver waits patiently, watching behind mirrored glasses as Mason spits out his used chewing gum onto the pavement before following Margot into the car.

Hannibal does not leave his spot behind the tree until Mason is long gone from the parking lot. A strange feeling goes up Hannibal’s spine, the feeling of eyes boring into the back of his head. He glances around at the building, then the parking lot, but there is no one outside besides the occasional patient walking to and from the entrance of the office. Hannibal, never one to ignore his instincts, maintains an air of ease as he walks to his own car and leaves the lot.

Spring has finally come to Baltimore in a rush of vibrant greens and small bursts of color from the daffodils and tulips exploding in flower beds along the side of the road. Hannibal rolls his window down and enjoys the smell of new life and sea air as he drives home.

Will is practically vibrating when Hannibal arrives. He speaks in rushed sentences that trip and weave, words hardly leaving his mouth before another spills forward to takes its place. Chiyoh is as amused as Hannibal by this, both looking at Will with unabashed fondness as he describes the proceedings at the courthouse today.

“I think I want to do something like that when I’m older,” Will says.

Hannibal raises his brow, surprised. “I did not know you wanted a career. I assumed you wished to remain at home if possible.”

Will rolls his eyes and kneels down to give Winston a belly rub. “You told me yourself that it is boring to sit around all day.”

“There are other ways to pass the time besides a vocation,” Hannibal says, voice light.

“Yeah, but I doubt you and I can just fuck each other all day. I mean, that would get old at some point, right?”

Chiyoh chokes, coughs, face flaming a brilliant crimson. She immediately gulps down a large glass of wine, then continues coughing as the liquid only makes her cough worse.

Hannibal, unashamed as always, merely shrugs his shoulders. “Whatever you wish, darling. It shall be yours.”

Will grins, something sharp and feral, and continues to rub Winston until both dog and human are equally covered in fur.

That night, Will convinces Chiyoh and Hannibal to indulge in far too much wine as they play several rounds of poker. Will had learned the game from watching his father play as a child; Hannibal and Chiyoh were taught by Murasaki. The difference in technique between the three provides no small amusement.

“You’re bluffing!” Will cries, throwing his cards face-down onto the table.

Chiyoh’s, whose face has been growing steadily pinker throughout the evening, nearly tips over her (fifth? sixth?) glass of wine. “Am not,” she slurs. “You think you are *so* clever with your empathy, but I have grown up playing against *Hannibal*. And winning against him, too.”

“Now, there’s no need to exaggerate,” Hannibal drawls.

Chiyoh sputters a few choice words in Japanese, and Will dissolves into giggles at the look of utter indignation on her face. As Chiyoh’s laughter calms, Winston gets up from his place near the fire and glances out the window. He pauses, growls, then begins to bark. Short, sharp barks, the kind meant to alert them of an intruder.

Immediately, all levity is gone from the room. Hannibal gives Chiyoh a pointed look, and she instantly scoops Will into her arms and rushes him down to the basement. Will splutters and squirms, attempting to break out of her grasp, but her hold on him is firm as she carries him away.

Hannibal gets his phone out of his pocket and checks the cameras in the backyard. There is no movement, either from his security team or an invader. That does not make Hannibal feel any more safe. He whistles once, sharply, to silence Winston’s barking, then commands the dog to follow him upstairs. His bedroom has a far better vantage point of the yard. It is also further away from the basement, a way to draw attention to him rather than Will.

Hannibal glances out from behind the curtains and into the yard below. There is a new moon, the sky completely black, clouds covering what would be a small smattering of stars.

Winston hops up on the window ledge beside Hannibal, paws scrambling for purchase. He, too, peers into the darkness. A growl rumbles from his chest, something low. Ominous.

“What do you see?” Hannibal asks, knowing he will not receive an answer.

Suddenly the world shatters around them. Broken glass cuts Hannibal’s face, sharp and stinging. His ears ring from the deafening noise. Hannibal blinks, attempts to gain his bearings when another, louder noise rings out.

The sound of a gunshot.

Hannibal ducks, cursing as something hurtles over the top of his head. Winston is whining and nuzzling at his face. One of his paws is bleeding from stepping on a piece of broken glass. It smears fresh blood over his muzzle, bright crimson against the soft orange of his fur.

Hannibal curses again and grabs Winston, crawling across the floor with the dog beneath his torso. Another bullet echoes over his head. It hits the mirror across from his bed. More glass shatters onto the floor. Hannibal can smell the smoke of burnt gunpowder, can smell the distress and fresh blood pouring from Winston, can smell (faintly) sweat and unfamiliar body wash from outside the broken window.

Inside his pocket, Hannibal’s phone buzzes. He pushes Winston into the closet, shuts the door, then brings out his cellphone. He turns the brightness down to the lowest setting, but even then the screen is a blinding source of light in the otherwise dark room.

Perimeter breached. Backup called. Do not engage. Unknown operatives.

Each of these texts was sent only a minute ago. Hannibal raises his phone to his ear, hands steady even as his heart trembles, and calls the number for the lead of his security team, the one charged with protecting Hannibal and Will here in Baltimore.

The phone rings. It rings.

Hannibal’s heart beats faster.

The line picks up.

“Hello, Dr. Lecter.”

The drawl is familiar. Unwelcome.

“Hello, Mason,” Hannibal says through gritted teeth. He crouches down again and moves toward the door of the bedroom. As he ducks beneath the window, three more bullets are fired. He can hear the echo of them through the receiver of his phone a millisecond before they pierce his own ears. “What can I do for you this evening?”

“Ah, funny enough, it’s what *I* can do for *you*.”

“I think you have done enough,” Hannibal replies dryly. He stands, one hand on the door frame, the other clenching his phone. Behind him, he hears a crashing sound, then two sets of footsteps. It appears as though Mason’s own team have made it to his house. Hannibal looks at the security app on his phone and sees them scaling the wall outside of his bedroom. The footage from the camera is sharp, yet Hannibal cannot parse their features as he runs up the stairs to the attic. Whoever Mason hired, it is no one that Hannibal recognizes.

Mason laughs into the phone. The sound of it is manic. Completely and utterly insane. “We have a comedian! You’re a funny guy, doc. I can see why my Margot is so taken with you. But no, I haven’t done enough yet. I have some information you want. And all I ask in exchange is an hour with your son. That’s it! Who knows, the little kiddo might even like it.”

Pure, unadulterated hatred flash behind Hannibal’s eyes at the thought of Mason touching Will. “An hour? For what?” Hannibal asks, uncaring of the answer. The longer Hannibal can keep Mason talking, the better. Hannibal puts his phone onto speaker and texts his security team Wolf Trap to drive, ordering them to drive over as fast as possible. He hopes they were already alerted of the threat as soon as the perimeter was breached, but it never hurts to be thorough. That done, Hannibal climbs the stairs to his attic and barricades the door with one of the harpsichords. It is a rudimentary defense, but Hannibal needs time, not precision.

“For whatever we decide,” Mason responds. “But that’s not really of your concern. No, I think you will be *much* more interested in the information I have to offer.”

“Then I suggest you lay out your terms more clearly if you wish to have a proper negotiation. What information?”

“A little birdy told me you’ve been having some problems with the paparazzi,” Mason says. He sounds positively thrilled.

“Did they?” Hannibal asks, neutral.

“Blackmail is no fun. No fun! I’ve had my fair share of threats over the years. Daddy always used his pigs to keep his enemies quiet. However, I prefer a more…hands-on approach.” Mason continues to talk, but Hannibal tunes him out.

Downstairs, Mason’s team have scaled the house and entered his bedroom. Hannibal closes his eyes and hopes (though he has long-since given up on such a thing) that they will leave Winston alone. Will would be *devastated* if Winston were killed. Hannibal thinks of Winston, trapped in the closet with a bloody paw, whining with distress as he tries to escape the closed door in order to protect Hannibal. For the first time since the mutt came home, Hannibal feels…affectionate toward the dog. He is glad that they took it in. Winston may now be the very thing that saves Hannibal’s life.

Hannibal bends down and places his ear against the floorboards to hear better, listening as two sets of footsteps go in two separate directions. One goes to the en suite bathroom and slams open the door. The other opens the door to the closet.

Eyes still shut, Hannibal waits and listens.

Instead of a gunshot, there's a surprised inhale, then a scream of agony. A deep, roiling growl echoes up the stairs. Hannibal can hear blood splatter, more cursing, then the sound of something tearing.

Silence.

The set of footsteps that went into the bathroom goes still.

"Are you even listening?" Mason asks, annoyed. "If you would rather I just take the boy, I will. I clearly have the upper hand here, Dr. Lecter. Your little team was *nothing*. Fertilizer for your yard. I'll even let your HOA know it's the latest trend in earth-friendly gardening, save you the police detail."

"So the photographs were not your doing, then," Hannibal says, forcing himself to keep Mason engaged in conversation. If Mason is to be believed (which Hannibal thinks is highly unlikely) then he knows about the blackmail but is not the sender. Hannibal cannot figure out who else would be so bold as to photograph him and Will—in Europe no less, halfway across the world—and then send him the picture in an unmarked envelope.

"Nope! Again, I prefer a hands-on approach. Blackmail isn't really my style. But I know whose style it is. And I'll tell you! All I want is the boy. One hour. I promise not to hurt him…too badly. I do like to play rough with my toys."

If Mason honestly believes that Hannibal would let Will in his presence for any amount of time, let alone an hour, then the man is more insane than Hannibal previously thought (and Hannibal's expectations for Mason's sanity were already extremely low).

Hannibal is not going to tell Mason that.

"How would I give Will to you?" Hannibal asks. He barely listens to Mason's reply, much more worried about the person now walking toward the closet (where, presumably, Winston is lying in wait with the intruder's dead companion).

Beneath him, there's another low snarl, then a high-pitched yelp as Winston is hurt in some manner. Hannibal grips his phone so tightly it creaks in his fist, the glass screen threatening to shatter from the pressure.

"Stay the fuck down," a male voice hisses. There's a pause, then another growl.

A gunshot.

Hannibal's heart stops inside of his chest.

It picks up again when the man screams. Winston rips something—a throat, or perhaps a limb—and more blood splatters onto the floor. Hannibal can smell it, faintly. The man's blood is diseased. Some sort of STD. Hannibal hopes it does not infect Winston now that he has had a taste.

"How about this," Mason drawls, oblivious to the two intruders now dead in Hannibal's bedroom. "You and Will come outside. I'll stay on the phone with you. You are welcome to

come with me and the boy; I know how…strong the bond between the two of you is. I'll have to keep you handcuffed and blindfolded of course. As soon as we arrive, I'll tell you what you want to know about the blackmailer, have my fun, then return the boy to your waiting arms. Neither of us ever has to speak again."

As Mason is talking, Hannibal pulls back the harpsichord and walks down the attic steps. The scent of blood grows stronger, bringing with it the acrid scent of fear and fresh urine. Hannibal peers into his bedroom to find Winston lying down on the floor surrounded by blood and two corpses. Both of the invaders have their throats torn out.

Winston is not moving.

Hannibal walks over to him and delicately scoops the dog into his arms. Hannibal can feel a heartbeat, though it is barely there, a wisp of a thing. Winston opens his bleary brown eyes and softly *whoofs* upon seeing Hannibal's face. Part of his right ear has been torn off by a bullet. His tail, bent awkwardly near the base, manages wags once before Winston whines from the pain and stops moving altogether.

"You expect me to be dragged into your car, blindfolded and cuffed, and then wait while you rape my son?" Hannibal asks. His phone is still on speaker, now tucked into his back pocket. He hopes Mason cannot hear his footsteps as he carries Winston down the stairs and toward the basement. "Absolutely not."

"Dr. Lecter," Mason drawls, "I really don't think you are in any position to be rejecting my terms. I'm already here. Your team is dead. Really, I'm being *nice* by even offering you a spot on my field trip."

Hannibal kicks open the basement door and walks down the stone steps. He pauses, sees Will and Chiyoh waiting at the bottom of the staircase.

Hannibal carries Winston over to the surgical table and gently deposits him onto the chrome slab. He pulls out his phone, glares at the black screen and says, "Your terms are rejected. Do not contact me again, Mason. The answer is no."

With that, Hannibal hangs up.

"Hannibal!" Will cries. He runs over and wraps his arms around Hannibal's waist, burying his head beneath Hannibal's chin. "We heard gunshots and screaming, and I was *so scared*." Will pulls away, just enough to peer into Hannibal's eyes, and says (with steel in his voice), "Don't you *ever* leave me like that again."

Tears stream down Will's perfect face. Hannibal caresses his curls, now soaked through with sweat and worry. "Darling, you cannot ask such things of me." Hannibal sighs and turns to Chiyoh. "There is no time. The two of you must leave. Now. Mason has killed all of the security surrounding the house and—"

"Mason Verger?" Will says. "Is that who was on the phone? Why is he here?"

“It does not matter,” Hannibal says, solemn. “He will be gone soon. The security team from Wolf Trap will arrive in half an hour. You both need to be as far from here as possible when that happens.”

Will’s arms clutch Hannibal tighter. His scent spikes with stress. With fear. With righteous anger. A potent cocktail, one which Hannibal is not immune to.

“No!” Will screams. “No, you’re not leaving me!”

“Will.” Hannibal bends down so that he and Will are at eye-level. He forces his voice to remain calm. Strong. For Will (and for himself). “I am not leaving you. I will never leave you. There is not a force on this earth strong enough to tear us apart. Mason is outside looking for you. He wishes to hurt you, darling, and I will not allow such a thing to happen. I need you to be brave for me, as brave as I know you are, and go with Chiyoh and Winston. We will only be apart for a few hours, then all will be well. Do you trust me?”

Will’s nose is red and dripping. His eyes are wild, darting around Hannibal’s face as if attempting to memorize each and every feature they land on. His hands shake where they clutch at Hannibal’s shirt.

“I trust you,” he whispers.

“Good boy,” Hannibal whispers back. He presses a soft kiss against Will’s nose, then stands. He fetches one of the medical kits from a nearby cabinet and hands it to Chiyoh who slides it over her forearm. She bends down and gently lifts Winston, both of them frowning at the whine he lets out from the sudden movement.

“Take them down the south tunnel,” Hannibal tells her. “There is a car waiting there. The keys are beneath the front seat. Drive to my safe house on the bluffs. I will call you as soon as I can. Do *not* come looking for me.”

Will gives Hannibal one last hug, then slowly pulls away.

“I love you,” he says.

“I love you,” Hannibal replies. “Now go.”

The sound of Will’s cries echo long past the time he has left. Hannibal watches until he cannot see Will and Chiyoh anymore, then forces himself to *move*. He rolls his shoulders and unzips his person suit, lets it fall to the floor in tatters. All that now remains is the beast kept inside, the one that hungers for flesh and the taste of fresh blood.

After all, Mason came here looking for a fight.

He will only find a monster.

Will can’t stop crying.

He worries that Chiyoh is annoyed with him, even if she doesn’t say anything.

Will's sobs follow them until they reach the car, a small sedan with Delaware license plates. He helps Chiyoh lay Winston across the back seat, then stays sitting with Winston's head in his lap as Chiyoh slides behind the wheel and pulls off into the night.

Chiyoh has either sobered up over the past hour or she is excellent at faking it (Will thinks a bit of both is probably most likely); she drives with efficiency, cleanly navigating the nighttime traffic and finding a space for their small car as it bounces between lanes.

"Where are we going?" Will hiccups. He rubs soothing circles onto Winston's head, trying hard not to move with each shift of the car. Winston's ear bleeds onto Will's pants. The blood is sticky. Warm. It clings to Will's skin through the fabric and catches on the thin amount of leg hair he's managed to grow.

"Hannibal's safe house. One of them, at least. It's a two-hour drive from Baltimore."

Will shakes his head and lets out a choked sob. "That's too far! What if he needs us? What if he's hurt? We need to be closer than that."

"Closer in order to do what, *ijirashii*? You are not medically trained. You can hardly defend yourself. You cannot help him by being near. You can only help him by staying safe."

Chiyoh's words cut deep, but the truth of them humbles Will. He sighs and gives up any other attempt at conversation as they continue their drive. The further they get from Baltimore, the more Will begins to crumble. He sags against the back of the seat and bites his tongue hard enough to spurt hot, salt-laced blood into his mouth. Sucking on the wound stings, but even the sharp pain does nothing to distract Will from his worry.

By the time they arrive at the safe house, the glowing green numbers on the dashboard read *1:17*. Winston's breathing is stuttered and uneven, and Will forces his eyes to stay open as he gets out of the car and helps Chiyoh move Winston inside.

"Are you gonna make sure he's okay?" Will slurs, stumbling up the steps of the house. It's long and sprawling, with a pointed roof and windows rather than walls. The back of it sits on a cliff, and Will can hear the ocean from here, loud and churning as it eats away at the bluffs.

"I'm going to try my best," Chiyoh says. Will forces himself to accept that there is no guarantee that Winston will make it through the night. The thought causes another fresh wave of grief to sweep over Will. It's only through sheer force of will that he remains standing upright against the sudden aching pain.

Chiyoh tells Will the code to open the front door. She walks into the kitchen and sets Winston onto the wooden table, turning on the lights as she washes her hands. She does not falter, her movements slow and even as she preps the kitchen for surgery.

Will immediately squints against the sudden brightness. He flinches away from the onslaught of warm yellow light, fumbling as he fetches a few washcloths from inside one of the kitchen cabinets while Chiyoh grabs the medical kit.

“Where did you learn to do that?” Will asks. He nods toward where Chiyoh is suturing the end of Winston’s torn ear. An empty needle lies to the side from the local anesthetic Chiyoh had administered before beginning to close the wound.

“Lady Murasaki,” Chiyoh says. Her hands are steady, purposeful as they pull the needle up again and again. “As her handmaiden, I was trained in all manner of skills. My medical knowledge is nowhere close to Hannibal’s, but I know enough.”

Will nods and fetches the roll of ace bandages. Together, they set the break in Winston’s tail and wrap it tightly so the dog can't wag it on accident and inadvertently re-break the bone.

“You should get some rest,” Chiyoh tells Will. Her voice is neutral, but Will can read the exhaustion in every line of her body, from the slump of her shoulders to the weary set of her mouth. “I’ll wake you as soon as I hear something.”

Will tries to argue, but all that comes out is a yawn.

Chiyoh smiles, something soft and sad, and shoos him toward one of the guest rooms. It sits next to the kitchen, a wide space with light blue walls and a modest-sized bed. Will slips beneath the comforter and is immediately uneasy with the cold, empty space beside him.

Hannibal should be here.

Hannibal should be pulling Will close, tucking Will’s head beneath his strong chin. Hannibal should be kissing Will on the nose and tugging at his curls and making Will shake with pleasure-pain. Hannibal should be whispering words of affection that strike a fire inside of Will’s core that is unquenchable, untamable. Hannibal should—

Will cries into the cool pillowcase beneath him and falls into a dreamless sleep.

A sharp noise wakes him.

“Chiyoh?” Will is still half-asleep, unsure if what he heard was real or merely a product of his tired imagination. He glances toward the open bedroom door and sees nothing, no light, no shadow of Chiyoh or Winston in the doorway.

Will pulls the comforter back underneath his chin and closes his eyes.

Another noise.

This one is the unmistakable sound of shattering glass.

Will’s eyes fly open. His heart instantly begins to race inside of his chest. His hands, shaking and sweaty, push against the mattress as he sits up in bed. His head spins for a moment, the lack of sleep catching up with him. Will waits for the world to calm before sliding to the floor. He stands there for a moment, trembling, then quietly walks to the open door.

He peers into the kitchen, unable to see much despite the multitude of windows. Without the moon outside to provide light, there might as well be solid walls instead of sheer glass.

Will stares into the empty room (wondering where Winston has gone), then reaches out to close the door. As soon as his hand is wrapped around the doorknob, another hand shoots out from the darkness and clenches down around his knuckles.

Will's scream is quickly silenced by a second hand, this one gloved. The leather over his mouth gags him, prevents him from making a sound. Will tries to pull away, but the two people holding him (still in darkness, still unseen) make it impossible for Will to move even an inch.

The person covering his mouth leans down, breath hot and moist against Will's ear, and hisses, "Make a sound and both the girl and the dog die."

Will nods his head in understanding, and the glove is slowly removed. Will sucks in breath after trembling breath. He cannot think, can barely walk. He never remembers a time he was so frightened. He obediently follows the hand holding fast to his wrist, wincing as it grips him hard enough to grind his bones. The second intruder stays close behind as Will is led through the kitchen and toward a broken window. Glass is strewn across the tiled floor. Will tries to steer clear of the shards, but in the darkness he steps on a piece. It pierces the bottom of his foot, cutting him and embedding itself into his heel. He bites down onto his bottom lip, ravaging the skin in order not to cry out in pain.

Will sees a large vehicle waiting outside in the driveway. Will is led to the car, then pushed into the back seat. As soon as the door is closed behind him, the car is driving away. On either side of Will are the two intruders. In the front seat, an imposing woman with pale skin and dead-looking eyes is behind the wheel. She keeps her face toward the road, though every few seconds she peers at Will with interest and curiosity through the rearview mirror.

"Where…" Will forces himself to be *brave* goddammit. "Where are we going?"

"That's none of your concern," the person to his left replies. "Just shut up and keep still."

Well, so much for being brave.

Will focuses on the pain in his foot and in his lip as they drive through the night. The sun begins to rise in the east, allowing Will to at least know what direction they are heading. South, more or less. Will keeps his eyes on the road, trying to pick out any landmarks or familiar places, but the safe house that Chiyoh drove to was hours from Baltimore, and Will was already hopelessly lost from the beginning of their journey. All the buildings and trees they pass look the same. They pass dozens of exit signs on the highway (*Emporia*, *Dunn*, *Florence*), but none of them help Will in any way. They might as well be in a foreign country for all that he recognizes where they are.

Despite his best efforts, Will falls asleep.

When he wakes, he is still in the same vehicle, though the sun has traversed across the sky and is now nearing the center.

They've been traveling for close to eight hours.

Will's bladder twinges, uncomfortable. Will can't remember the last time he had something to drink (perhaps it was the small sip of wine Hannibal had given him while they played poker, Chiyoh laughing at the sour expression on Will's face when he tasted alcohol for the first time).

It seems like a lifetime ago.

Will squirms as much as he is able, still trapped between two bodies much larger than his.

"Quit it," the person on his right snaps. "I said no moving."

Will trembles and opens his mouth. "I…I need to use the restroom." Surely they don't expect him to go much longer without peeing, right? Will suspects that they all will need to stop soon. He has no idea how much further they are driving, but at *some* point they will need to take a break, right? Unless, of course, the three people in the car with him have their bladders removed in order to be more efficient kidnappers.

Will wouldn't put it past them. He would believe anything at this point.

"Hold it," the man says.

Will frowns and forces his legs closed in an attempt to stave off the burning in his lower abdomen.

Thirty minutes later, Will is squirming once more. He opens his mouth to ask a second time, but before he can speak, the car pulls into a gravel driveway and begins driving toward an imposing-looking mansion. The final minute of their drive is agony, each second putting more and more pressure on Will's full bladder as the car jostles from the bumpy ground. He is practically vibrating by the time they stop in front of the entrance.

The person to his left stays seated while Will is tugged out of the car. He is practically dragged up the stone steps, each one agony on the glass embedded in his heel. Will glances around, noting more people in suits (guns surreptitiously strapped to their sides) standing around the entrance. Inside the building, Will is carted up two flights of stairs, then thrown into a room twice the size of Hannibal's office back home. The ceiling stretches up into the distance, a gaudy chandelier seated in the middle. All around Will are shelves of books. A fireplace sits across from him, unlit and empty of any ash or wood.

Will trembles and takes a step toward one of the many leather chairs dotted around the room. He cannot sit, afraid that he will lose control of his bladder if he does. Instead, he places his hand on the back of the chair and forces himself to look for a weapon, for something to defend himself with. He has no idea why he's here or who is in charge of his kidnapping. If it *is* Mason, Will needs something to keep the horrible man (and his wandering hands and eyes) far, far away.

Will spots a paperweight sitting on the desk near the fireplace. He walks over, places the heavy glass orb into his pocket, then walks back to the chair. As soon as he is standing beside it, the door opens and a woman strides inside.

She is short, only a few inches taller than Will. Her hair has been dyed an icy-blonde, nearly the same shade as Bedelia's. Her eyes are a piercing green, and they rove over Will with untamed interest as she stands in front of him. She's wearing a flowing white dress—something purposely unimposing, Will intuits—and a delicate golden necklace.

When she smiles, Will physically reels back.

It's like looking into a mirror.

"Hello, Will," the woman says. Her voice is quiet, smoother than Will had imagined, with just a hint of southern twang.

Will can only stare. The earth feels as though it has been ripped away beneath his feet, and he is falling, falling. His stomach swoops and soars as it waits for an impact that never comes.

"I know, it is truly dreadful the circumstance under which we've met, but sacrifices had to be made." The woman tilts her head to the side (Will is reminded of a bird, something small and ravenous) and sits on the chair across from Will, one slim ankle crossing over the other. "Tea? It's too early for lunch, I'm afraid."

When Will still refuses to speak, the woman smiles (something sharp, something cruel) and nods toward the chair Will is still standing behind. It's the only barrier between them, the one shield keeping Will from the truth.

"Really darling, there's no need to be so shy. I don't bite." The woman glances at Will's uncovered neck. "Unlike your…adopted father, I see."

Will snarls at the mention of Hannibal and covers up the bite marks on his neck—those are gifts from Hannibal, a sign of his unending love and affection, not something to be shared with *her*.

Another person comes into the room then, pushing a small metal cart. On the top shelf sits a teapot and two cups. Next to the teapot is cream and a plate of perfectly stacked sugar cubes.

"Thank you, Allan," the woman coos.

Allan nods his head, blushing, then walks back out of the room.

The woman looks back to Will and tuts. "Please, sit."

"I need to pee," Will blurts out.

The first words he's ever spoken to his mother.

He'd be more embarrassed if he wasn't so…anxious? Confused? Hurt? Will cannot even begin to parse all of the emotions raging through him at the moment. As soon as he clutches onto one, it slips from his fingers and another takes it place. Instead of wrestling with his feelings, Will shoves them into the back of his mind and forces himself to focus on the woman in front of him.

“It’s been a long journey, I imagine. I am terribly sorry for keeping you waiting,” the woman says. She stands, graceful in her bearing, then walks to a side door that’s tucked behind a bookshelf. “There is a restroom just through here. Please, if you would follow me.”

Will walks to her, seeing no other option. He sticks his hand into his pocket to hide the paperweight, his sweaty palm sliding along the glass as he strokes it over and over again. It’s comforting, the weight of it, the heft.

The woman leaves a trail of flowers in her wake. Each step she takes releases the smell of roses and lilies. Will wrinkles his nose at the sweet perfume and nearly cries with relief when he finally sees the bathroom at the end of the hall.

“I’ll be right outside,” she tells him, voice deceptively calm.

A threat.

Will stumbles into the bathroom and slams the door behind him. He has barely lowered the toilet seat and unzipped his pants before his bladder is finally emptying his bladder. After, Will flushes and slowly (more slowly than he ever has before in his life) washes his hands.

While the water is still running, Will quickly checks the cabinets underneath the vanity. They are empty save for an extra hand towel and a few rolls of toilet paper. Besides punching a hole in the mirror and collecting the shards, Will has no other options for a weapon. The paperweight in his pocket is his only hope.

Will frowns, purposely does not look at his reflection (he does not want to see his lips, does not want to see the way they look like a carbon copy of the woman’s mouth outside), and finishes washing his hands. He dries them, stalls for another moment, then opens the door.

“Feel better?” the woman asks. She eyes his clenched fists with interest.

Will nods, refusing to speak again.

The woman sighs and tilts her head back toward the hall. “Come. We have much to discuss.”

As they are walking, Will imagines slamming the paperweight into the back of her skull, watching it cave in with visceral satisfaction. He imagines her crumpling in a heap to the floor, blood and brain pouring from the wound. He imagines what would happen after: an endless maze of stairs and rooms, someone in a suit finding him and shooting him, (Hannibal, alone once more).

Will keeps the paperweight in his pocket.

If he is going to make it out of this alive, he needs a plan, not an impulsive attack. And Will fully plans to leave this place alive, one way or another.

His mother, on the other hand…she forfeited her life the moment she took Will away.

She has no idea the monster who is coming to find them.

Sweet Poison

Chapter Summary

Hannibal and Mason reach an understanding. Will and his mother talk.

Hannibal had expected Mason to be rash, but this is…simply ridiculous.

While Hannibal stays inside the basement waiting for his security team to arrive (mourning the loss of his Will), Mason and three others scale the wall to his bedroom and climb through the broken window. Hannibal watches through the security cameras stationed throughout his house as Mason looks at the two dead members of his own team in Hannibal's closet with dull amusement before walking into the upstairs hallway.

Mason talks to the three men following him, though Hannibal cannot make out the words from his place deep beneath the house. At one point, Mason finds Hannibal's supply of drugs and slips several needles and pill bottles into his pocket.

The boy is completely at ease as he walks, unaware of the danger he is in, uncaring that Hannibal is alive and still very much a threat. Hannibal has to remind himself that Mason is a boy. A rich, privileged, sadistic nineteen-year-old who got his own sister pregnant simply because he could.

Hannibal cannot wait to tear him apart.

As soon as Mason enters the kitchen, Hannibal's phone begins vibrating in his hands. He gets an alert that the security team from Wolf Trap has arrived and is waiting outside for further instruction. Hannibal tells them of the current threat (three men of unknown training and Mason), then suggests they enter through the French doors that lead into the kitchen.

Hannibal walks up the basement steps that lead to the pantry and opens the trap door, waiting in the darkness for the right moment to strike. He hears the exact second that Mason's trio see his team on the other side of the glass; there's a loud yell, then the familiar sound of shattering glass. Bullets fly as the two teams clash.

Hannibal waits for the chaos to die down, then throws open the pantry door. In his hand is an axe he proffered from the basement, blade sharpened to perfection, the handle an intimate friend as it rests, heavy, in his palms.

"Hello," Hannibal greets one of Mason's team, a middle-aged man with a buzz cut and a large, protruding forehead. Hannibal hefts the axe up into the air, then watches it swing down with visceral satisfaction. The man's torso is neatly cleaved into two, the right side crumpling to the floor of the kitchen in a heap while the left side slumps against a cabinet.

“Cordell!” Mason screeches. Blood from the halved body sprays across the room and coats Mason’s face, a few errant drops covering his glasses. Mason turns to face Hannibal with a murderous expression, but before he can step forward, one of Hannibal’s team shoots him in the knee. Mason collapses, hits his head on the floor, and immediately passes out. Hannibal looks away from the pathetic excuse for a human and swings his axe at the next of Mason’s crew who is foolish enough to face him.

It takes less than five minutes to dispatch Mason’s team. The three men are easy to kill now that they no longer have the element of surprise. Each of them falls, either to Hannibal’s blade or a bullet from one of his team. Hannibal briefly considers killing Mason himself, then thinks of a much more satisfying ending to the intolerable man.

Hannibal sets his bloodied axe to the side and pulls out his phone, dialing Margot’s number.

She answers on the second ring.

“Dr. Lecter?”

Her voice is hoarse, perhaps from being sick. She had mentioned in their last therapy session that her pregnancy had been especially hard on her stomach. Instead of morning sickness, she was nauseous at all hours of the day, with only a few moments of respite that allowed her to eat a bowl of soup or drink some mint tea.

“Hello, Margot. This is a courtesy call. Your brother is currently incapacitated on the floor of my kitchen with a shattered kneecap. If you can come collect him within the next hour, he is yours to do with as you please. Otherwise, I will have to dispose of the body myself.”

Margot’s stuttered inhale is not faked. She did not know of Mason’s plan, then. “I see. I’ll be there in thirty minutes.”

“Wonderful,” Hannibal replies. “And if you wouldn't mind taking what remains of his team, I would be ever so grateful. I’ve heard the swine on your farm are useful for more than just providing meat.”

Margot sighs, graceful in her apathy, and readily agrees. “I’m sorry you had to deal with him. I…I’ll be there soon.”

“Do not apologize, Margot. There is no catharsis to be had in apologizing for things beyond our control.”

“I’ve never had a psychiatrist quite like you, Dr. Lecter,” Margot says.

“I would expect nothing less,” Hannibal sniffs. He hangs up and turns toward his own team, noting the grim frowns and potent sadness etched into each of their features.

“We’ll go collect the bodies outside,” the team lead says. She scratches her crooked nose, flecks of blood falling off beneath her fingernails. “What should we do after? Stay or go back?”

Hannibal thinks of Will and Chiyoh. “Stay with me,” he commands. “Dispose of the bodies, then come with me to my safe house in Cape Charles. My son is waiting there.”

“Of course,” the lead agrees. She barks out a few orders to her team, and Hannibal watches as they vanish into the darkness outside. Hannibal wonders, briefly, if any of his neighbors have seen or heard anything untoward during this entire debacle, but somehow he doubts it. The sheep here are ignorant and arrogant. Lazy. They have grown complacent in their ivory towers; even if their dull senses did see or hear anything, Hannibal suspects it would be written off as another eccentricity of Hannibal’s rather than something worth alerting the authorities about.

Hannibal spends the next thirty minutes calling Chiyoh; she tells him Will is fast asleep and Winston has been patched up as much as Chiyoh’s capabilities allow. Though she has some medical training, it is meager compared to Hannibal, and human medicine does not always translate well to other species (despite humanity being animals themselves). Her voice is laced with exhaustion, and Hannibal tells her to go get some rest until he and his team arrive.

Mason wakes from his unconscious slumber only a few minutes before his sister arrives to collect him.

“Hello,” Hannibal greets, teeth sharp and fully on display. He leans over Mason and puts the heel of his shoe on Mason’s wounded knee. The cry of pain Mason lets out will be enough to feed Hannibal’s beast for years to come. “I believe you have some information for me?”

“Fuck you,” Mason sneers, though the effect of the words is somewhat dulled by the tears streaking down his cheeks and the saliva gathering at the corners of his mouth.

“Not quite,” Hannibal tuts. He presses down harder on the bullet wound. Mason screams, loud and blood-curdling. “Shall we try again? The blackmailer. Who is it?”

“I don’t know,” Mason sobs.

Behind Hannibal, he hears a knock on the front door.

“That would be your sister,” he tells the pitiful man writhing on the ground in front of him. “I assured her that she could take care of you. I am sure that she is more than capable of doing so. However, I am also capable of dealing with swine such as yourself. Now, you are going to tell me a name, or I am going to cart you down to my basement and force the name from you one flayed muscle at a time.”

Mason hiccups and trembles. He opens his mouth, blood trickling from the corner of his lips, and says, “Veleno. Some bitch from Georgia. She paid me to come here and take Will. That’s all I know, I *swear* .”

“I believe you,” Hannibal grins. He raises his foot and smashes it down one last time. Mason’s knee splinters, the force of the impact causing it to dislocate. Mason screams and then passes out once more.

Hannibal sighs, rolls his shoulders, and slicks back the hair that has fallen into his eyes. He walks to the front door calmly and opens it with a pleasant smile.

“Margot,” he says. “Please, your brother is waiting for you in the kitchen along with what remains of his…friends.”

Margot does not look as Hannibal expected. Instead of entering his home scared and trembling, she strides into the kitchen with a fire blazing in her eyes. There’s a darkness there, something deep and terrible, and Hannibal is pleased with his decision to hand Mason over to her custody. She will treat him with the same kindness he has treated her, and through her revenge, Margot will *become* .

Hannibal watches—with no little amusement—as Margot directs her own team to scoop up Mason and carry him to the car waiting outside. The bodies of Mason’s three men are thrown haphazardly into plastic duffle bags.

“Here,” Margot offers. She removes a plain leather wallet from her purse and unfolds several stacks of hundred-dollar bills. “For the cleaning. Blood isn’t easy to remove.”

Hannibal shakes his head and refuses the money. “I appreciate the gesture, but it isn’t necessary.”

Margot shrugs and puts the stack of bills back into her wallet. She glances down at the bloody axe lying against the cabinets, then at Hannibal’s disheveled appearance. “I really haven’t met a psychiatrist like you before,” she murmurs. “Who *are* you?”

“A concerned party,” Hannibal replies blithely. “And as much as I would like to stay and discuss this evening’s events, my son is waiting for me. I’m afraid I must bid you adieu, at least until our next meeting.”

“Isn’t this…I don’t know, some sort of conflict of interest?” Again, Margot’s eyes dart around the blood-splattered kitchen. “Should I still even be seeing you and Dr. Heimlich?”

“Margot, it is far time that you begin to make such decisions for yourself. I hope your brother will not be able to compel you for much longer. Therapy is a personal decision. Should you decide to come back to the office, I would be happy to resume your treatment.”

For the first time since Hannibal has known her, Margot smiles. It’s awkward, ill-fitting, a coat not often donned. Hannibal feels something akin to pride flutter within his breast. “Thanks, Dr. Lecter. I…thank you.”

Hannibal nods his head and escorts her to the front door. “Good luck, Margot.”

Margot leaves, and Hannibal quickly darts upstairs to change out of his stained clothing. He messages his more *discreet* cleaning service, the one he employs for crime scenes and other equally-illegal activities, and asks them to come as soon as possible. His house will need to be wiped down from top to bottom. No one (save his family, his security team, and Margot), will be privy to what occurred tonight if Hannibal has his way (and he usually does).

That done, Hannibal allows himself the luxury of a quick, thorough shower before texting Chiyoh that he is leaving Baltimore and will arrive soon. Hannibal receives no response, though he does not expect one. Now that the threat with Mason is over, Chiyoh and Will deserve some rest.

Hannibal also texts his private investigator, telling him to search for the name *Veleno* and any connections to Georgia or the Verger family. That done, Hannibal slides behind the wheel of his Bentley and leads the way to his safe house on the bluffs, his security team trailing behind in an unmarked SUV.

Halfway there, Hannibal's phone begins buzzing inside of his pocket. He takes it out and sees Chiyoh's name flash across the screen.

"Hello?" he answers, eyes never straying from the dark road in front of him.

"*Hannibal*." It comes out as a sob rather than a spoken word. Chiyoh's crying.

Hannibal has never heard Chiyoh cry before.

"Chiyoh, what happened?"

"They took him," she says, voice shaking and practically crazed. "They took him while I was asleep. Broke through the window just like your home in Baltimore. I woke up and killed the man in my room, but by the time I went outside they had left. That was mere seconds ago. Hannibal…I—I'm so *sorry*."

Hannibal grits his teeth and nearly swerves off of the road. He throws his phone to the passenger's seat and pounds on the steering wheel with his fists. A scream sits perched at the base of his throat, and he only manages to hold it in by biting down on his tongue and washing down the scream with a fresh wave of blood.

"I'm thirty minutes out." His voice is deathly quiet. "Did you get the license plate?"

"Yes, I just sent it through a text." Chiyoh is still crying, though her words come out steady. It would be admirable if Hannibal weren't so upset. He can't remember the last time he felt anger like this. Raw, surging anger that sears the back of his throat and sits, smoldering, inside of his stomach.

Beneath that anger is fear.

Pure, unadulterated fear.

Hannibal has lost Will.

Will, the one thing in his life that he loves. The one thing in his life that makes this mortal existence worth living. The one thing he would die for again and again in the most horrific ways a person can conjure. Hannibal would endure any pain, swim through any sea, carve out his own heart if it meant keeping Will safe. Alive.

Hannibal lets himself a single, anguished cry before zipping up his person suit and clearing his throat. “We will be there in less than thirty minutes. Begin tracing the license plate. Wherever they are taking Will, we will follow.”

“Yes, Hannibal.” A pause. Chiyoh takes in a shuddering breath. “I’m sorry,” she repeats.

“Prove it to me. Show me you are sorry by bringing back Will.” Hannibal does not care how calloused it sounds, how cruel. He is a cruel person by nature. Only Will has managed to temper him into something kind and soft. And now Will is gone, taking with him Hannibal’s last thread to humanity. Hannibal feels the thread snap, fall to the ground of the car, useless. His monster prowls at the edges of his subconscious. It has already gotten a taste for blood tonight.

It hungers for more.

“Of course,” Chiyoh replies instantly. “We’ll find him, Hannibal. Together.”

“We must,” Hannibal says.

There is no other alternative.

Hannibal hangs up and continues the rest of the drive considering different possibilities for Will’s kidnapper. Hannibal examines Mason as a possible candidate but quickly discards the notion. Mason was not working alone in his endeavor tonight. Hannibal surmises that whoever this Veleno is, *that* is the person responsible for Will’s disappearance.

When Hannibal arrives at Cape Charles, Chiyoh is waiting for him out on the front porch. She sits on the bottom step with slumped shoulders and purple-ringed eyes. There’s a cut along her right cheek, raised and puckered, and in her left hand is a gun. She stands as soon as Hannibal is out of the car and runs to him, prostrates herself on the ground. Her entire body is trembling as she peers up at him from her knees.

“Get up,” Hannibal says. “There will be time for penance later. Have you found the car?”

Chiyoh rises unsteadily. Hannibal reaches out and grabs hold of her shoulder, gripping it tightly to keep Chiyoh from collapsing back to the ground.

“No, not yet,” she says.

Hannibal gestures for his security team to follow him inside. He notes the broken window beside the kitchen. The glass has been swept up into a neat pile. Hannibal can smell Will’s blood in the air. He growls and walks over to the pile of glass, noting one of the shards is stained around the edges with crimson. He picks up the piece and brings it to his nose.

Sweat. Blood. Fear and anxiety and the musk of Will’s skin.

Hannibal grips the piece so hard it slices open his fingertip. He sighs, places the glass into the breast pocket of his suit jacket, then goes to sit at the kitchen table.

For the next hour, Hannibal, Chiyoh, the security team, and Hannibal's private investigator each use every resource at their disposal to do two things: locate the vehicle that took Will, and find out who Veleno is and where they are located.

The second task proves easier than the first.

"Here," Chiyoh says. She passes her tablet to Hannibal and points to a satellite image of a sprawling mansion in northern Georgia. "Belongs to Dulcie Veleno. Daughter of the late oil baron Richie Veleno."

Hannibal frowns and zooms in on the house. There is nothing special about it, nothing that stands out, yet Hannibal swears he has seen it before.

"Does she have any relatives in Baltimore?" he asks.

Chiyoh slides the tablet back to her side of the table and does a few searches. Her eyes scan the screen faster than Hannibal thinks it possible for her brain to process what she is seeing. She pauses for a moment, then gasps.

"What?" Hannibal asks. He doesn't wait for a reply, merely looks down at the screen and squints.

Chiyoh is scrolling through someone's Instagram account. Near the middle of the page is a photograph of the mansion in Georgia. In front of the mansion is a petite woman with blonde hair and a smile that makes the hair curl on the back of Hannibal's neck.

Beside her is Linda Roche.

"Cousin," Chiyoh says. "Linda is—was—Dulcie's cousin."

"Is this a personal vendetta, then? A way of getting revenge? I killed Linda, so Dulcie is taking my son? Why not just kill him and be done with it? Why kidnap Will at all?"

Hannibal peers down at the photograph once more. Something isn't right. There's a piece of this puzzle Hannibal is still missing. He stares at Dulcie, at the curve of her lips, the shape of them. Hannibal can almost *feel* those same lips pressed against his own…

"Dr. Lecter." Hannibal looks over at the security lead. She points excitedly to her own device. "We have visual on the vehicle. Traffic cameras just picked up the license plate. Looks like it's heading south on I-95. If we leave now, we can trail behind and hopefully gain on it before it reaches its destination. Or Will switches to a different car."

Hannibal is standing before she has finished her sentence.

"Let's go," he says. "Your team will lead. Chiyoh and I will follow behind in the Bentley. I want every instrument at your disposal locked onto that vehicle. We are not losing sight of Will again."

As they are walking out the front door, Hannibal turns to one of his security team, a man with long brunette hair and a scar across the center of his forehead and says, "Stay here with

Winston. If his condition worsens, take him to the nearest animal hospital."

The man frowns, sulks. Clearly he is not taken with the idea of babysitting an animal while the rest of the security team chases after Will.

Hannibal does not appreciate the attitude. "I will pay you handsomely," Hannibal says, though he is already paying an obscene amount for the team's presence tonight. "May I have your name?" Hannibal files the name in his mental rolodex, plans what meal he will make of the man's useless frontal lobe (clearly he is not using it to make sound decisions).

Behind the wheel of his Bentley, Hannibal speeds down the narrow road that winds along the bluffs, Chiyoh by his side. They reach the highway in record time. Hannibal presses harder on the accelerator, listens to the hum of his engine as he sets a course south.

Hannibal will never allow Will out of his sight again. Not after today. He will stitch the boy to his side, one suture at a time, if that is what is necessary. Bind their hands, meld their hearts. Whatever it takes, Hannibal is willing to do it in order to keep Will by his side. Forever.

As Will sits down in the leather armchair across from…the woman, the cut on his heel re-opens and begins to bleed onto the cream-colored carpet. The woman frowns at the blood, distaste and annoyance clouding her features.

She rings a metal bell that is sitting on the coffee table at her side. It's the kind of bell that Will's seen in hotel lobbies or at restaurants with too-few staff. "Just one moment," she tells Will. "I'll have someone…take care of that."

Hannibal would have noticed Will's injury right away. Hannibal wouldn't have been mad at Will for getting blood on the carpet. No, Hannibal would have bent down and licked the droplets up with his tongue, cleaned the wound with gentle, loving hands, then bandaged it with a delicate kiss.

Will aches so badly he feels as though he cannot breathe.

Allan walks back through the door, this time without the tea cart.

"Allan," the woman greets. "Will requires your attention. It appears he has some sort of wound on his heel."

"I see," Allan sniffs. He looks down his long nose at where Will is sitting, eyeing the stained carpet with equal amounts disgust and resignation. Will squirms on the leather seat, uncomfortable with the idea of anyone other than Hannibal touching him (uncomfortable with this entire damn situation). "Shall I fetch the doctor?"

"Yes, please. I also want a full physical for Will. I am unsure what sort of…care he has been under with his adopted father. He'll need to be thoroughly looked over."

"Of course." Allan shoots the woman a besotted look, then leaves.

“Would you stand for me?” the woman asks. “I’m interested to see if you took after your grandfather in height. Neither your dad nor I are very tall, I’m afraid.”

Will remains seated with a completely blank expression on his face.

“I see,” the woman sighs. “Perhaps we can begin with introductions instead. My name is Dulcie Veleno. I am your mother.” Dulcie pauses, waits for some sort of reaction at this proclamation (perhaps screaming or endless tears of joy, Will isn’t sure how delusion Dulcie is to expect either). When she receives none, Will sees a sliver of annoyance shine through her green eyes before she continues speaking. “Again, I apologize for the circumstances of our meeting. I had no idea you existed even a year ago. When I left you in John’s custody, I wasn’t sure whether you would remain there. I wasn’t sure whether he was capable of keeping another human being alive. Yet here you are, twelve years later.”

Will bites his bottom lip, sucks on the blood seeping from the open wound. He made a promise to himself he wouldn’t speak another word to her. He isn’t going to break that now despite the hundreds of questions swarming through his mind. They peck at his brain, tiny slivers of matter eaten away until all that Will has left inside his head is his self-control (which is more like crumpled aluminum rather than iron).

Dulcie tilts her head to the side and hums. “You look just like him, you know. Well, how John *used* to look before the alcohol ravaged his body. Is that how he died? I always suspected it would be the sort of thing to get John in the end. That or his own lack of self-respect. My daddy never touched the bottle, even during the course of business. Said it was too great a temptation once you got started. Your grandfather was very wise. It’s a shame you can never meet him.”

Allan walks back into the room with a woman in tow. She’s wearing a white robe, and there’s a stethoscope wrapped around her neck. In her hand is a black bag. She smells like rubbing alcohol and worn leather.

Will instantly dislikes her.

“Dr. White, please come meet my son, Will.”

Again, Will has to hold onto his tongue in order not to shout *I’m not your fucking son*. Will doesn’t think Dulcie would appreciate the sentiment.

“Hello, Will,” the doctor greets, all politeness. “May I look at your foot?”

Will shakes his head no.

Dr. White glances to Dulcie, and Dulcie inclines her head forward. All three of the adults are staring at Will now, and he shifts in his seat once more, unbearably uncomfortable and overwhelmed by the amount of emotions he is reading off of them.

Dulcie is annoyed and unimpressed with Will’s small act of defiance. Allan thinks Will is inferior, a bug to be crushed beneath his large feet. Dr. White is unsure what to think or feel,

desperate to follow orders but filled with a strong moral fiber that shirks at the idea of touching another without their consent.

Will is tired. Will is upset. Will is…Will is trying so incredibly hard not to shatter into a thousand pieces onto the floor. He wishes he were the blood dripping from his foot, wishes he could bleed into the carpet and get soaked up by the expensive fibers, disappearing away from all scrutiny.

“Go ahead,” Dulcie commands. “I want him examined from head to toe.”

Will shakes his head hard enough to make him dizzy. The room spins, swirls. Will swallows down his sudden nausea and stares fearfully at Dr. White.

“Ms. Veleno…”

“*Now*,” Dulcie snaps.

Dr. White stands close enough to Will that he can feel her warm breath as it lands along the planes of his arm, the curve of his neck. Will is trapped in the chair with nowhere to go, nowhere to run. He grits his teeth and stares at Dr. White’s black clogs. He clenches his jaw hard enough that it creaks, muscles aching from the sudden tension.

Sighing, Dr. White bends down and gently grasps at Will’s injured foot.

Will kicks out with all the strength he possesses. He has grown strong these past few months. Long walks with Hannibal and training with Chiyoh and fighting against the current of the stream outside of Wolf Trap have given him strong, sculpted calves.

Will’s foot catches Dr. White beneath the chin. Her head snaps back from the impact. He can hear her teeth clack, see the tip of her tongue get bitten off and fall to the floor. His toenails scrape into her throat and peel away the top layer of skin. Blood drips from the wounds, five bright lines that begin at her bottom lip and end at her clavicle.

“Will!” Dulcie screams.

Dr. White stares up at the ceiling, dazed. She immediately stands and takes several steps away from Will’s chair, dabbing at the cuts on her neck with her fingertips, something akin to wonder on her face. When her fingers pull away, freshly coated with blood, the wonder and shock turns into fear.

Will grins.

“He’s feral,” Dulcie hisses. “John couldn’t raise him, and that foreign bastard who adopted him is no better. He slaughtered Linda, you know. Packed her body into a duffel bag and shoved it into his trunk. Disgusting.”

Linda? How the hell does Dulcie know about Linda?

Will keeps grinning, though there is nothing but hatred coursing through his body. Tears prick the corners of his eyes at the mention of Hannibal. Will keeps the tears inside, keeps them

fueling the rage in his body. He *is* feral, at least in this moment. He wants nothing more than to lean over and sink his teeth into his mother's carotid artery, rip out the flesh of her throat and watch her bleed to death on her precious cream carpet, another stain to be cleaned.

"Well, go on," Dulcie says, as if Will hadn't just injured Dr. White.

It is Dr. White who shakes her head this time. "No, I…no."

"No?" Dulcie asks, voice deceptively calm. A shiver runs up Will's spine. Despite Dulcie's innocent appearance, she is clearly not someone to be crossed. "Dr. White, if you want to keep your job, or your daughter, I suggest you do exactly as I say. Finish the exam. Sedate the boy if you have to."

With trembling legs, Dr. White walks back over to Will. Instead of bending down to hold his foot, she opens her leather bag and draws out a needle. It glints in the late morning sunlight, a sliver of sharp silver.

Will leans back against the seat and glares at Dulcie with as much contempt as he can possibly convey in a single look.

"I apologize," Dr. White says. As she bends forward to stick the needle in his arm, Will reaches into his pocket and draws out the glass paperweight. Before he can second-guess himself, Will bashes the heavy object into the doctor's skull. It doesn't break through bone, but it does pulverize her skin. Her hair is instantly matted with crimson, and the doctor crumples to the ground, needle falling to the floor by her side.

Will ignores Dulcie's scream and Allan's gasp. He reaches down, snatches up the needle, and runs to Allan's side. Before the man can even react, Will sticks the needle into one of his bony arms and watches with satisfaction as he sways from the sedative.

Will turns back to Dulcie and pushes her back into the armchair. She screams and hits him, long fake nails raking against his face and chest, but Will has an extremely high pain tolerance. Her scratches are nothing compared to the bruises and welts left by Will's birth father.

It seems both of his parents have injured him in their own way.

Will can't wait until they are both dead.

"Stay," Will hisses. "Fucking *stop*."

Dulcie, realizing Will is much stronger than he looks and more than capable of keeping her in place, finally begins to calm. Will pins both of her wrists in one hand, takes her phone away with the other. He tosses it to the floor and shatters it with his uninjured heel. A few new shards of glass embed themselves in his foot. Will hardly feels the pain, too high on the adrenaline, too lost in the smell of fresh blood and fear.

"I have some questions," Will says. "And you're going to answer them."

“Is that so?” Dulcie asks. Her voice quivers. She retains control of her face however, calms it, turns it into a smooth mask (nowhere near as sophisticated as Hannibal’s person suit, certainly not enough to trick Will’s empathy). “And if I decide not to answer?”

“Then I’ll rip out your fucking tongue.”

Dulcie shivers.

Will grins once more. He already plans on ripping out her tongue (later), but Dulcie doesn’t need to know that.

“You had better hurry then,” Dulcie says. “The guards come in to check every hour. I’m rather looking forward to having you tied up and locked in a closet until you can learn to behave like a human instead of a beast.”

Will narrows his eyes and tightens his grip on Dulcie's wrists, enjoying the way she winces at the sudden change in pressure. “Hannibal will be here soon. He’ll find me. And when he does, there won’t be a space on this planet that you can hide from him. Or me.”

Dulcie’s pupils dilate with fear, black swallowing up the green. She licks her lips, opens her mouth to speak, then promptly closes it again.

“My questions,” Will begins. “How did you find me? Was it really by seeing my face on the television after Robertus’s funeral?”

Dulcie scoffs, has the audacity to look at Will as if he were dense. “Of course not. When daddy died, I was finally free to go looking for you. That was last October. My private investigator found you easily enough once the adoption papers came through. I only messaged Hannibal after the funeral because people are at their weakest when grieving. It seemed the best time to ask for a maternity test to be sure you were mine. I used a fake name, of course. It would do no good to have Hannibal come looking for me, not yet.”

“Why couldn’t you come find me when your dad was alive? Why did you wait until after he was gone?”

There’s a sadness that creeps into Dulcie’s face then, something quiet and solemn. “I never should have gotten pregnant to begin with. John was…John wasn’t supposed to happen. But he did, and I ended up pregnant at sixteen. Daddy was furious. Threatened to haul me off to the nearest clinic when he found out about my condition and have you removed. But abortion is a sin against the Lord. I refused. Instead, daddy made me give you up as soon as you were born.”

Will’s breathing has grown more and more labored as Dulcie speaks. He pictures it so clearly in his mind: a young Dulcie, fresh-faced and naive, sleeping with the first man who throws her a kind smile. Dulcie, alone and ashamed at her sin but still desperate to win favor in her father’s eyes. Dulcie, relieved and saddened in equal measures at having Will out of her sight as soon as he leaves the confines of her body.

“Why look for me at all?” he grits out. “Why couldn’t you just *leave me alone*. You’ve done enough already.”

“I’m your mother!” she shouts. Her wrists jerk inside of Will’s grip, nearly pull away. “It isn’t *right* that you were taken away. It isn’t natural. And to find that you ended up with some…some faggot murderer? As if you needed a worse father after John. No, as soon as I found you, I knew you needed to come home. To come back to *me* .”

Before Will can ask his next question, the door to the room bursts open and a swarm of armed guards flood into the space. Dulcie sits smug and imperious beneath Will as two of the guards grab him, one on each arm, and drag him to the wall.

“Strip him,” Dulcie hisses.

Will kicks out and struggles with all of his strength, but it’s of no use. The two guards holding him are strong, far stronger than him, and they pin him between their arms as a third man comes over and flicks out a knife from a strap around his waist. He cuts away Will’s flannel shirt, then strips Will of his jeans. When Will is left standing in nothing but his boxers (he is glad, then, that he is wearing boxers and not the lingerie Hannibal gave him, knowing Dulcie would probably kill him on sight at wearing such an ‘unnatural’ thing), the third guard moves away and Will is left staring, nearly naked, at the woman who gave birth to him.

“What is that?” she asks no one in particular, staring at Will’s pectoral. She stands, walks over to Will. She doesn’t come close enough that he could kick her if he tried.

She’s learning.

Dulcie tilts her head and peers down at the *HL* carved into Will’s chest. The wound is still fresh, the scab bright red and puckered.

“Dear God, he *marked* you?” she says. “An *animal*. Both of you are animals.” Eyes ablaze with righteous fury, Dulcie swallows her fear and stalks over to Will’s spread form. She bends down and digs her nails into the mark Hannibal left. Will cries out at the stinging pain. He twists and turns, tries to buck away from Dulcie, but the guards hold him fast.

Will feels blood begin to trickle down his torso and soak into the fabric of his boxers. Dulcie’s nails give a final jerk, then rip away the flesh surrounding the cut.

“Much better,” she purrs, right hand dripping with blood. “We’ll have to bandage that later. For now, let it be a lesson for you, darling. You are mine, not his. I won’t have any marks left on my property that aren’t left by me.”

Will looks Dulcie dead in the eye. He sees an ache there, an emptiness left from the death of her father (from her teenage pregnancy, from the loss of a son she never knew). Will pushes away Dulcie’s feelings and focuses on his own.

He spits in her face.

Before Dulcie can react, a man comes barreling through the door. He looks at the doctor splayed out on the floor with a steady stream of blood trickling from her head, then at the unconscious form of Allan, clear puncture mark in his arm. Finally, his eyes come to rest on Will, spread between two guards, Dulcie standing in front of him with saliva trickling down the middle of her face.

Will recognizes the man. He's the one Will saw outside of the courthouse yesterday (and god, was that only yesterday? It seems like a lifetime ago), the one with the camera wrapped around his neck. His lips curl into a sneer at what he sees, something predatory flashing behind his plain brown eyes.

"Ms. Veleno?" he asks.

"What?" Dulcie snaps. "I'm busy, George."

"My apologies. However, we've lost all contact with the security team posted at the gate. How would you like us to proceed? Should we take you and the boy down to the house in Athens?"

Will grins. He begins to laugh. Long, shaking howls that wrack his body and cause the marks on his chest to ache and burn. Dulcie turns to look at him as if he's completely unhinged. Maybe he is. Maybe he never stood a chance at normalcy, not with the people who brought him into this world.

"You're fucked," he tells Dulcie. "It's Hannibal. He's here. And none of you are going to make it out of this alive."

Becoming

Chapter Summary

Hannibal finds Will. Together, they wreak their vengeance.

Hannibal can smell their fear.

It seeps through his nostrils, spreads like poison as it coats his throat and settles deep into his lungs. He clenches his hands into fists, steps out of the car, rolls his shoulders. The three guards posted in front of the home's main gate are all lying on the ground in puddles of blood. Bullet holes riddle their useless bodies which still cling, uselessly, to life.

Hannibal stands over them. He lifts his polished oxford and carefully, delicately places it on the trachea of the guard below him. Hannibal presses, face as smooth as stone as the man wriggles and claws at the shoe on his neck to no avail. It only takes a minute for the man to suffocate, another minute for his limbs to stop twitching from myoclonic seizure.

When Hannibal looks up, he sees that the two remaining guards have been killed by Chiyoh, throats effortlessly slashed with the bloodied knife in her hand. She nods at Hannibal, and he tilts his chin, walks back to the car.

"Drive," he commands one of the members of his team, voice even.

Chiyoh pushes the gates open. The car rolls down the gravel drive, stopping for a moment as Chiyoh hops back inside. She wipes her bloody hands onto the fabric of her black trousers in a vain attempt to clean them.

"How do you envision this going?" Chiyoh asks as the car starts to move again. The sound of gravel crunching beneath the tires is soothing, almost, a monotonous melody to match the calm pounding of Hannibal's heart.

"Simply," Hannibal replies. "Any person desperate enough to form an alliance with Mason Verger is not a threat I fear. Desperation makes people dangerous, but only because they act out of self-preservation and instinct rather than deliberation. I plan to use Dulcie's desperation against her like the gleaming tip of a knife; I will cut her, flay her alive, and when she begs for mercy, I will let Will decide her fate."

"And what will you do with her guards? Staff? Family?"

Hannibal turns and stares into her eyes. They are steel, the cool metal of an unfired gun. "Save yourself," he says. "Kill them all."

Chiyoh nods, pulls out her phone, and relays Hannibal's instructions to the other cars trailing behind. The instructions are simple enough; Hannibal knows his team will be able to follow them through.

When they pull in front of the sprawling mansion, Hannibal's upper lip curls at the gaudy display. The vaulted windows are scrubbed clean of any dust generated from the gravel drive. The front door is crowned with a large wreath that is filled with peonies in every shade of red possible to contrive. Hannibal visibly shudders as his eyes trace the turret looming over the entire east wing of the building, completely useless in function save to display the poor taste of the home's owner.

Hannibal signals for two of his team to secure the perimeter. The rest follow Hannibal as he shoots the doorknob off of the front door and walks into the entrance.

His arrival is greeted with pure, unfiltered chaos.

Hannibal thrives.

The gun in his hand is discarded, substituted for his favorite scalpel. He rolls up the sleeves of his button-down, revels in the feel of hot blood and thick viscera as it coats his palms. He hears nothing but screams, sees nothing but red, feels nothing but the beating of his heart, thinks nothing but *Will Will Will*.

The first floor is cleared. Hannibal follows the team lead onto the second floor, pauses when he picks up the scent of Will. Afraid and upset and bleeding but *alive*. Hannibal readjusts his grip, slides the scalpel further down so that it is nearly dangling from his fingertips.

"There," he says. His voice drifts down the empty hall, echoes in the spaces where Will should be.

Chiyoh hisses and wipes away a bead of sweat. There is fresh blood on her thigh, her own, and drying blood on her hands and chin, none of which came from her own body. "He is yours, Hannibal. Take him back."

Hannibal growls and stalks down the hallway. He is followed by Chiyoh and the rest of his team. When Hannibal reaches the door where Will's scent is thickest, he turns the knob and walks inside without an ounce of fear.

The room is bright, larger than he expected, with a vaulted ceiling and rows of bookshelves. The windows allow generous light to pour in, illuminating the scene with perfect clarity.

On the ground near the door is an unconscious man. Beside him is a woman in a white smock with blood trickling from her skull. Further toward the wall is Dulcie, eyes wild, dried blood beneath the nails of her right hand. Hannibal takes in the shape of her lips, the color of her skin.

She is Will's mother.

Hannibal curses himself for being so blind. All of the pieces slot together, the puzzle finally arranged inside of his mind. Dulcie, the mother who abandoned Will, coming forward once more to try and reclaim what she erroneously thinks belongs to her. As if the fact that Will carries her blood could make him in any way hers. Will carries Hannibal's blood, too.

Hannibal made sure of it, encouraged Will to sink his small, sharp teeth into Hannibal's skin and take what is his to keep.

Behind Dulcie is Will.

Will, lips peeled back in a feral snarl, hair mussed, no clothing save for a pair of tight black boxers. The initials Hannibal had lovingly carved into the boy's skin are torn, ripped away from the sacred space above his heart. His eyes are an electric blue, the same shade of a coiled pit viper just waiting to strike. He smells of spiced adrenaline and lingering sweat and the sweet musk of relief.

He is breathtaking.

And he is Hannibal's to have.

A man standing beside Dulcie whips a gun from the holster on his hip and shoots at Hannibal. Hannibal easily dodges the bullet, throws the scalpel held loosely in his fingers. It glistens as it flies through the air. There's a soft squelch as it embeds itself in the man's right eye, sharp blade cutting through sclera and sinking into the optic nerve.

The man's scream is loud as he collapses to the ground, one hand clutching to the scalpel stuck inside of his head as if to ensure it does not fall out. Blood trickles from the wound, stains the man's face a stunning shade of crimson.

The two guards holding Will's arms glance at Dulcie. They reek of fear. Hannibal breathes deeply, salivates at the scent.

"Keep him," Dulcie hisses. She glares at Hannibal, and he must give her credit for standing firm against him despite the tremble in her chin and the sweat pouring from her skin.

"No," Hannibal says. His voice is low but firm. "Release Will. Immediately. I promise the consequences are not any that you wish to endure."

Hannibal sees Chiyoh from the corner of his eye. She stands at his side, tense, ready to move at the slightest command from Hannibal. Outside the door, Hannibal can hear gunshots and groans of pain from the hallway. Dulcie's other guards are being taken care of, one by one, and Hannibal is fully confident that his team will serve him well.

"Release him," Hannibal says. "I will not ask again."

"Move and I will kill you myself," Dulcie snaps.

The guards holding Will look at one another. One drops their hand, releasing Will's right wrist. The other does the same. Dulcie lets out a high-pitched screech as Will turns and begins sprinting toward Hannibal. Her hand darts out, a pale blur, and pulls Will so that his

back is pressed against her chest. One hand wraps around Will's bare sternum, the other pulls out a knife from her pocket and presses it tightly against his throat. Dulcie is only an inch taller than Will, and her face is mostly obscured by Will's own rage-filled expression.

Chiyoh sneers and tightens her grip on her knife. Hannibal reaches out, palm up, and silently asks Chiyoh for her weapon. Chiyoh easily slides the knife into his hand, pulling another one out from the inside of her boot.

Behind Hannibal, one of his team members shoots both of the guards who had been keeping Will hostage in the head. They slump to the ground, the remains of their pitiful lives smeared across the window like shards of stained glass.

"Dulcie," Hannibal says. "A truly contemptible sight, to see a mother cowering behind her child."

"She's not my mother," Will says, eyes blazing. The knife presses into his neck. A thin bead of crimson appears, drips down his collarbones and mixes with the dried blood splattered across his chest.

"Apologies, Mylimasis," Hannibal coos.

Dulcie grimaces at the term of endearment and shuffles backward a step, dragging Will along with her. "Enough. Will and I are leaving. Take one step forward and I will slit his throat."

Hannibal raises an eyebrow. "Do you imagine such a threat will endear Will to you any further?"

"I don't care," Dulcie hisses. "I don't *care* ." Tears begin pouring down her face, obscuring the sound of her voice. "He is mine. He is all that I have left. I never should have let him be taken away."

"And yet you did," Hannibal says. He watches as Will's hands, unnoticed by Dulcie, begin to slowly slide backward, edging closer to Dulcie's hips. "And Will suffered years of horrendous abuse because of it."

"That wasn't my fault. You can thank John for that."

"I did," Hannibal replies. "Personally."

Will locks eyes with Hannibal. There is no trace of fear, no hint of apprehension. Just determination and a love so fierce it takes Hannibal's breath away. Hannibal shakes his head, slightly pleads for Will to not do anything rash. As soon as there is an opening, Hannibal will throw the knife and rid Dulcie from this world once and for all. That is the safest option, the one least likely to cause Will any more harm.

Will smiles, and Hannibal's heart shatters into a million pieces. He can only watch in horror as Will turns his head, oblivious to the knife slicing into his throat, and sinks his teeth into the supple flesh of Dulcie's face.

"Will!"

Hannibal's voice is distorted, a strange echo as it spreads across the room, a roiling wave of terror.

Dulcie screeches as Will pulls back, an arc of crimson following his wake. A gaping hole is left behind, all orbital adipose tissue removed by Will's teeth. Blood pours from the open wound, and when Dulcie screams, Hannibal can see her teeth and tongue through the gash.

Will spits the offending tissue from his mouth and slams his forehead into Dulcie's, knocking her to the ground. Hannibal is running across the room, then, uncaring of anyone or anything else except the perfect boy standing a few inches away (too far, always too far).

"Hannibal…" Will turns, blood dripping from the corners of his lips, and launches himself into Hannibal's arms. The knife is knocked out of Hannibal's palm, but he does not care, does not focus on anything but Will, trembling inside of Hannibal's embrace, a live wire of emotion and adrenaline.

Home.

Hannibal is home.

Will buries his nose into Hannibal's neck, breath brushing against his exposed skin. Hannibal clutches the precious boy in his arms. A single tear runs down the side of his face, unchecked. Hannibal cannot bring himself to feel ashamed at the display of emotion.

"Darling." Hannibal's voice is hoarse. Broken. "I'm here." Hannibal forces himself to pull away from Will in order to properly assess the boy's wounds. "How is your throat?"

Will whines at the loss of Hannibal's skin pressed against his, and Hannibal shushes him, gently places a finger beneath his chin and lifts it in order to view the wound. It is shallow, though long, a clean line of red from one side of Will's neck to the other.

"Fine," Will says. His piercing eyes never leave Hannibal's. He licks his bottom lip, the remains of his mother's blood coating the tip of his tongue. "I knew you would come."

Hannibal grins, all teeth. "For you, darling? Always."

There's more commotion from the hallway. Chiyoh clears her throat and points to Dulcie, who is lying on the floor, the occasional soft moan leaving her torn mouth. "What are we to do with her?"

Will sneers at the mention of Dulcie. He pulls back from Hannibal in order to glare down at the writhing woman.

"Will?" Hannibal asks. "This is your decision to make."

Will doesn't move. He seems entranced by the sight of Dulcie lying in a pool of her own blood. Hannibal waits a moment, then two, then gently lifts his hand and places it on Will's bare shoulder. Will startles, jumps at the touch. His blazing eyes find Hannibal's. Will seems to swim through his consciousness until he is aware of himself once more.

“I want her to see you and me. Together.”

Hannibal tilts his head. “In what way, Mylimasis?”

Will turns to Chiyoh. “Can we be alone?”

Chiyoh raises an eyebrow. “For how long?”

“As long as you can give us.”

She glances at Hannibal, then nods. “Very well. I’ll knock on the door when it’s time to leave. I estimate we have around fifteen or twenty minutes before the police arrive. One of Dulcie’s guards must have called when we arrived.”

Will grins, and a slither of something dark and primal goes up Hannibal’s spine. “We won’t need that long.”

Chiyoh clears her throat and gestures for the rest of Hannibal’s team to leave. “Out,” she commands, voice calm and low. An order that will not be disobeyed. “You heard Will.”

Quickly, everyone (who is still living, of course) leaves the room. Chiyoh is the last to exit, giving Hannibal a long, meaningful look before closing the door behind her.

Hannibal turns to Will and stares at him, blood-soaked and trembling with righteous anger and utterly enchanting.

“What is your design?” he whispers.

“*Noriu, kad išdulkintum mane*.”

Hannibal’s nostrils flare, and his eyes narrow, pupils dilated. “Now?”

Will grins again, and Hannibal thinks of blood-drenched blades, of dark nights spent lying in wait for prey and the taste of fresh meat on his tongue.

“Now.”

Will licks his lower lip, tracing the remains of blood from his tender skin. The blood is sweet, far sweeter than what he is used to tasting on his hunts with Hannibal, much sweeter than the crimson he has licked from wounds inflicted on Hannibal from his own teeth and hands.

Dulcie indeed.

Hannibal watches the movement with black eyes, body trembling with arousal. Will grins at this—at the physical manifestation of just how much *power* he has over this man—before beckoning Hannibal closer with a crooked finger.

They come together in a clash of teeth and tongue. Will opens his mouth, allows Hannibal to lick inside with heat and bitten-off moans. Will whines at the familiar taste and pulls

Hannibal closer, clutches his fingers into Hannibal's sweat-soaked hair, runs his hands through the silky strands until they are completely mussed, no product left to hold them into some semblance of style or control.

"Inside me," Will growls. Demands. "I want you inside of me."

Hannibal's answering growl is near feral, a low rumble that sends twin shivers of arousal and fear coursing through Will's veins.

Behind them, Dulcie lets out a quiet moan and turns so that she is no longer facing them.

"No," Will says, pulling away from Hannibal so that he can bend over his (not) mother and yank her head forward. Her eyes are glassy, from fear and pain and the stirrings of disgust. "You will watch. I want you to know how thoroughly I am owned by someone who is not *you*."

Dulcie tries to move her head, tries to break away from Will's grasp, but all she manages is a weak tug that ends with a fresh trickle of blood escaping the hole inside of her cheek.

"If I may," Hannibal offers, ever the gentleman. He leans down and grabs Dulcie's arms, fingers digging into the tendons of her bicep. He pulls her arms over her head, then twists her shoulders until there is a loud cracking sound. Dulcie screams, and Will watches with wonder as Hannibal arranges her broken arms until they serve as a prop for her head. A pillow of bone and sinew so that she can watch Hannibal take Will, fill him with seed, claim him as only Hannibal can.

Will whimpers at the sight, so aroused he can hardly breathe.

Hannibal quickly releases Dulcie and comes back to Will, wrapping his strong arms around Will's waist with a force that is too violent to be considered a caress.

"How do you want me?" Hannibal asks, breathless. His sharp cheekbones are flushed, slick with sweat that glistens in the bright afternoon light.

Will bites at Hannibal's bottom lip, then pushes him onto the ground. Hannibal complies, a facade of weakness. "I want to ride you."

Hannibal groans and his hips give a small, involuntary jerk. "Yes, Mylimasis. I'm yours. Any way in which you desire."

Will sheds his boxers and delights in the way Hannibal is still fully clothed while Will is bare to the world, every inch of his skin on display. Will kneels down and crawls over Hannibal's prone body. He deftly unbuckles Hannibal's belt, then slides his hand inside of Hannibal's briefs to claim his prize.

Dulcie lets out another choked-off moan.

"Stop," she begs. "Enough. I cannot watch this."

Will turns to her with a feral grin, hand moving up and down over Hannibal's wet shaft. "Oh, come on," Will teases. "We haven't even gotten to the best part."

Dulcie's eyes are firmly closed shut. Will wishes he could cut off her eyelids, peel back the skin until she is forced to see each and every depraved way that Hannibal molds himself into Will.

Perhaps next time.

Will digs his fingers into the scabbed-over wound on his chest. The pain is bright and sharp, his nails opening the very letters that Hannibal had so lovingly placed there only days before. When Will's fingertips are thoroughly coated in his own blood, he reaches behind himself and begins to open up his rim.

"Perfect," Hannibal says. His eyes are half-lidded, intense in a way that Will feels honored to be able to witness. "*Tu esi tobulybė*."

Will whines and tosses back his head, exposes the long line of his throat. Hannibal immediately surges up to claim the delicate skin. His teeth cut into Will's collarbones, bruising and biting and achingly wonderful. Will feels the exact moment Hannibal's teeth breach the skin. He feels his blood begin to pour, feels Hannibal's tongue sweep over each drop in exaltation. Worship.

"I'm ready," Will gasps. He lowers one of his blood-soaked hands and grasps Hannibal's cock, guides it to his under-prepared hole.

The first inch of Hannibal inside of him is nothing but pain.

The next few inches burn, pull at his very core. Hannibal's large shaft pushes inside of him with nothing but brute force and the slight slickness provided by Will's blood. Will forces himself to relax, to let Hannibal inside, to open himself up so that Hannibal can fill him again and again.

The final inch is ecstasy.

Will wails, cries, thrashes as he is finally entered in one long, unending thrust. The blood is tacky and nowhere near enough to properly prime him for such a large stretch. By the time Hannibal is fully seated inside, Will isn't sure whether it is sweat or tears pouring from his face as he gasps and writhes on Hannibal's cock.

"This is all I ever wanted for you, Will." Hannibal growls. He rolls his hips, grinding the head of his shaft deep inside of Will's stomach. "For both of us."

Will looks at his mother, broken and bloodied on the floor. He looks at the other dead bodies lining the room, each killed by their own hubris. He looks down at the man he loves, the extension of himself, the line blurred where one ends and the other begins.

"It's beautiful," Will whispers.

He begins to roll his hips, knowing their time is short. They won't need much; already Will feels the tightness in his sac as Hannibal's cock grinds into his prostate. Will's knees burn as they slide across the carpet. Each time he raises himself up, a small whimper escapes his mouth at the separation, and it's not until Will is fully seated on Hannibal's shaft again that he feels whole.

When they come, it is as one. Will arches his back and sings out his ecstasy to the heavens. He revels in the feel of the hunt, the feel of Hannibal inside of him, the feel of utter triumph that only a god can feel after destroying their own creation.

Hannibal's own release is hot as it spills inside of Will's stomach. Will clenches around Hannibal, his own seed spilling onto Hannibal's shirt which, up until this moment, had not so much as a drop of blood on its pristine fabric.

After, Will slumps down across Hannibal's chest and suddenly wishes Hannibal were bare so that Will could feel his smooth skin and coarse chest hair. Will whines and noses at the buttons of Hannibal's shirt, and the older man shushes him, holds him close.

"Darling," Hannibal murmurs.

Before he can continue, there's a loud knock on the door. There's a pause, then another knock. Chiyoh's muffled voice filters through the door. "I'm afraid we must leave."

Will groans and forces himself to stand. Hannibal's soft shaft slips from his loosened rim. Will shivers at the feel of warm, thick seed trickling down the back of his leg and drying on his skin.

Hannibal stands as well and tucks his cock back into his trousers. Will gives it a longing glance, wishing it were back inside of him, filling him up.

Hannibal gives Will an amused look, then gestures to Dulcie. She is nearly unconscious, eyelids trembling as a fine sheen of sweat soaks from her body into the thick carpet below. The blood from her cheek has mixed with her saliva, and the viscous liquid drips down her neck like a glossy lacquer, staining the gold of her necklace until it is completely covered in crimson.

"What shall we do with her?" Hannibal asks. His eyes are solemn, piercing as they look at Will.

"Am I deciding?" Will asks.

"Of course. This is your design, darling. Whatever you wish, it shall be yours."

Will smiles and nods to the broken body of the woman who claimed to be his mother. "Bring her with us. I'm not finished with her. Not yet."

Hannibal's answering grin reminds Will of the crocodiles that lurked in the swamp near his home: pointed teeth and curled lips and the calm confidence of a predator that knows it has successfully captured its next meal.

With all the grace of a jungle cat, Hannibal bends down and pulls Dulcie into his arms. The gesture would seem sweet, romantic even, if not for the sickening way her broken arms dangle limply by her sides. Dulcie whimpers and continues to tremble. Small moans leave her gaping maw with each shift of Hannibal's grip on her torso.

Will slips on his boxers, then grabs the rest of the clothing that had been taken off by Dulcie's guards. The flannel shirt is useless, cut down the side so that it hangs in tatters by his feet, but his jeans are still in one piece. Will puts them on and grimaces at the feel of harsh fabric against his sore knees.

As he and Hannibal walk out of the room, Will gives one last look to the carnage they have left behind. It seems no surface has been saved, blood splattered on every floor, wall, and item of furniture.

"Will this get you in trouble?" Will asks, worried. "Both of our fingerprints are everywhere. And Dulcie will be missing from her own home. The police will know we came here and took her."

Hannibal smiles down at Will, something small and tender, and shakes his head. "Do not fret, my love. The security team I brought will clear out the room and stage it in a way that does not implicate either of us. They have more than enough experience in such matters."

Will steps toward the staircase and lands hard on his heel. The cut on the bottom of his foot opens once more, and Will winces at the sudden sharp pain.

Hannibal instantly turns to Will, concerned. "Will? Are you well?"

Will nods. Lies.

"Will…"

"It's just my foot," Will mutters. "I cut it when I was kidnapped. Stepped on a shard of broken glass. I think it's bleeding again."

Hannibal frowns. He turns to Chiyoh and shoves Dulcie into her unsuspecting arms, not trying in the slightest to be careful of Dulcie's copious injuries. As soon as his hands are free, Hannibal scoops Will into his arms and begins carrying him down the stairs.

Will gives a single token protest even as he snuggles closer to Hannibal's chest. He wraps his arms around Hannibal's neck and inhales the familiar smell of musk, blood, and expensive cologne.

As they navigate the grand staircase, Hannibal murmurs words in Japanese to Chiyoh that Will cannot begin to understand. Then he turns to Will and asks, "Is there anything you wish to take? This house is yours. The property inside of it belongs to you."

Hannibal pauses at the base of the staircase. Turns so that Will is facing one the large, intricately-decorated rooms. From his perch inside Hannibal's embrace, Will can see

countless vases, books, pieces of furniture, and other things that belonged to his mo—to Dulcie.

Will sighs and slumps further against Hannibal's chest. He can hear the steady thump of Hannibal's heart, can feel the heat radiating from his skin. Will aches to remain there, to stitch himself beneath Hannibal's ribs so that they will never be separated again.

"Burn it down for all I care," he whispers. "I just want to go home."

Hannibal nods. He gives Chiyoh a meaningful look, and she begins to give orders to Hannibal's team, Dulcie's limp body still hanging from her arms. Hannibal ignores the commotion and walks with sure steps to the front door. As soon as they arrive at the Bentley, Will is tenderly placed onto the back seat. To Will's surprise, Hannibal slips onto the leather beside him rather than going to sit behind the wheel.

"Are you not going to drive?" Will asks.

Hannibal smiles, soft and sweet, and tucks one of Will's unruly curls behind his ear. "And leave your side? Never."

Will rolls his eyes, but a blush rises up onto his cheeks nevertheless. He leans against Hannibal, gives a sigh of happiness when Hannibal picks him up and deposits him in the older man's lap.

Chiyoh shoves Dulcie's limp body into the trunk with no little glee, and then walks to the driver's seat. Will stares at her, amazed that her hair can still be immaculate despite the bodies she just sent from this life into the next. Chiyoh notices Will's gaze and gives him a small smile through the rearview mirror. Her eyes are swimming with guilt. Remorse. Will knows she blames herself for his capture. As soon as they are back in Baltimore, Will will make sure she gets rid of that guilt. It is not her fault that Dulcie is a psychopath, after all.

Hannibal nods his head, and Chiyoh takes that as a cue to leave. She immediately shifts the car into drive and begins pulling down the gravel path. Behind them, the rest of Hannibal's team has slowly trickled from the house. They surround the building, and Will is surprised to see large plastic jugs in several of their hands. They pour something out of the jugs along the edge of the house, soaking the bright green lawn until it looks more like a puddle of tar rather than grass.

From out of nowhere, the sides of the house are suddenly engulfed in flame. It licks along the brick and siding, shattering windows and scorching the roof until it is nothing but charred tile, black and brittle. The reflection of the flames dance along the car and singe Will's pupils. He blinks, staring at the remains of what could have been (the life he could have lived, the mother he could have known), then turns back to Hannibal.

"I love you," Will whispers. His neck is still sluggishly dripping blood from Dulcie's knife, his chest aches from the way Dulcie's nails had dug into his skin, his knees are raw from riding Hannibal, and the cut on his foot stings with each beat of his heart. His hair is matted and sweaty, and each time Will licks his bottom lip, all he can taste is blood.

He has never felt more alive.

“I love you, Will,” Hannibal whispers back. A vow. “I cannot tell you how proud I am of you.”

“Proud?” Will tilts his head back so that he can look at Hannibal’s face. Will’s eyes caress each of the features he loves so much: bleached eyebrows and high cheekbones and lips the color of rose quartz. His eyes continue downward, soaking in the appearance of Hannibal. A strong chin that stays steady no matter the danger. A long neck that bears the marks of Will’s desire in shades of purple and black. Large hands that hold Will close, wrap around his waist and nearly swallow him with their touch. Firm legs that feel as though they were meant to support Will.

“Yes, Mylimasis. Proud. How could I not be? You have overcome all that this life has deigned to throw at you, and here you stand now, defiant and radiant in your glory. A blood-soaked god brought to life. I could not be more pleased to call you mine.”

Will’s eyes fill with tears. He tucks his nose into Hannibal’s neck, feels his shoulders shake as he silently cries.

“Thank you,” Will says. “I suffered so much because of my parents, but if that’s what it took to bring me to you, I would suffer it again and again, a thousand times over if it meant I would end up here.”

Hannibal’s arms flex, hold Will even tighter. “There will be no more pain for us. We will move forward from the ashes of both of our pasts and construct a new life together. One where you do not suffer. Not anymore.”

Will leans back and places a soft kiss along Hannibal’s jaw, his lips tingling from the feel of coarse stubble. “I like the sound of that.” He bites down on Hannibal’s skin, his eyes rolling back at the feel of his teeth sinking into soft, supple flesh. “Well, maybe a little pain.”

Hannibal’s laugh is a balm for Will’s wounded soul. “For you, darling, I will give the world.”

Will smiles. It curls at the edges, razor-thin. It is not a pretty smile, but there is something soothing about its sharpness. “I’ll take it.”

The Teacup Restored

Chapter Summary

Hannibal and Will recover from their injuries. They create their first tableau.

Chapter Notes

So this only took five-hundred years to finish. Apologies for the long wait, I am so grateful to everyone who has read this story and left comments or kudos. This was the first fan fiction I ever wrote, and though it isn't the first story I've finished, it still holds a special place in my heart. I hope you enjoy.

“Darling, are you ready?”

There’s a loud bang, then muffled shuffling as tiny bare feet patter down the stairs at a (frankly frightening) velocity.

“Yes!” Will’s smile, as it appears, is absolutely radiant, a compressed star trapped inside of Hannibal’s home and allowed to bloom until its light reaches every dark corner and narrow space. Will’s smile is always radiant, of course, whether small and shy or large enough to reveal sharp incisors. The boy’s current smile is confident, proud, so different from the shivering thing that Hannibal found all those months ago in the bayou.

“Careful,” Hannibal cautions. “Your foot is still healing.”

Will rolls his eyes, but there is no malice in the gesture, only an overwhelming fondness that causes Hannibal’s heart to race inside of his chest. “Sure. I’m not going to forget, *coeur*, I can feel it when it hurts.”

Hannibal sighs (his own fond gesture), then places a delicate kiss to the soft skin of Will’s forehead. “Of course. I defer to your judgment on the matter.”

Will sniffs and sticks his nose in the air. Hannibal allows his eyes to roam over the splash of freckles across Will’s nose and cheeks.

“You should always do that,” Will retorts. “Just so you know.”

They both smirk at their own ridiculousness. From down the hall, there’s a very pointed *ahem* as Chiyoh clears her throat.

“We will be late,” she says. She raises a dark eyebrow and crosses her arms.

“Hannibal says we can never be late because that would be uncouth. Instead, we are *purposely unhurried*.” Will flawlessly mimics Hannibal’s accent, and the sound of it (rumbling, deep, smooth) from Will’s lips causes Hannibal to shudder with arousal.

“Hannibal is a liar,” Chiyoh says, monotone, “and we are now officially behind schedule.”

Will smothers a giggle with the back of his hand. His palm proves rather useless in this endeavor, the sound of his laughter filtering through his fingertips and fluttering in the air. Hannibal savors it, stores it in his Mind Palace (as he stores each and every sound Will makes, whether words or laughter or moans of pleasure).

The three of them walk to the garage, then slide into the Bentley. Chiyoh does not hesitate to sit in the back of the vehicle, content to let Will stay up front next to Hannibal.

It is a short drive into the heart of Baltimore. The streets are uncluttered this time of day, too early for lunchtime traffic, too late for the morning rush. Hannibal feels a sense of overwhelming contentment fill his body as he parks in front of the courthouse. He smoothly gets out of the Bentley, walks over to Will’s door to open it for him.

Will blushes—as though this is the first time Hannibal has opened a door for him and not the hundredth—and graciously accepts Hannibal’s hand as he steps outside.

“Are you excited?” Hannibal asks. It is a useless question; he can smell the excitement rolling off of Will like a strike of lightning, sharp and electric.

Will gives Hannibal an unimpressed look. “You know I am.”

“And yet it fills me with joy to hear you say so. This is the fruit of your labor, after all.”

Will squeezes Hannibal’s hand, his tiny fingers hardly able to wrap around Hannibal’s broad palm. “Fine. I am excited. I’ve been watching the jury closely this entire week, and there is only one person who isn’t completely sold that Lisa is guilty. I hope today convinces them. The evidence is certainly there.”

Will’s voice is sly. The boy is incomparable in his relentless pursuit of his goals. Hannibal is still amazed at how carefully and meticulously Will planned Bedelia’s murder—and Hannibal has never loved someone so much, so completely, as when he learned that Will had killed another out of sheer jealousy over Hannibal’s attention.

“You did well,” Hannibal says, voice soft.

Will practically melts against him, his body leaning against Hannibal’s side as they walk up the steps of the courthouse and through security. The inside of the courthouse smells of a strange mixture of wood polish, sweat, and faux leather. Hannibal wrinkles his nose, hand carefully placed at the base of Will’s spine as they walk into the room where Lisa’s trial is being held.

“Look,” Chiyoh murmurs. She guides them onto a wooden bench, then points to where Lisa and her attorney are seated near the front of the room. “She knows what today will bring.”

Indeed, Lisa looks ready to go straight from the courtroom and onto the transport vehicle to prison. She is dressed in a bright orange jumpsuit, black numbers painted on the shoulder, silver cuffs delicately wrapped around each of her nimble wrists. There are heavy purple bags under eyes, and her hair has lost its luster, no doubt a symptom of the cheap shampoo used inside of the jail (and a lack of hair dye to cover her graying roots).

“Good,” Will whispers back, giddy.

The bailiff orders everyone to rise. Will is so short that his view of the room is completely blocked by the reporter standing in front of him. Hannibal looks down at Will’s curly hair, (his upturned nose, the wrinkle around his eyes as he glares at the reporter’s long torso) and wonders yet again how he was ever so lucky to possess such a magnificent creature (and be possessed by said creature in turn). Will notices Hannibal’s gaze and looks up at him with love-struck eyes, all annoyance easily melted in the warmth of Hannibal’s eyes.

The judge sits, bangs her gavel against the podium. Will jumps at the sudden, sharp noise, and Hannibal hides his laughter behind his palm.

The bailiff allows them to sit once more, and Hannibal immediately grabs Will’s hand and holds it close, wishing he could pull Will into his lap and tuck the boy’s nose into the crook of Hannibal’s neck, but such an action would draw far too much attention, and Hannibal is determined not to ruin Will’s moment of triumph today (no matter how selfishly he wants to keep Will’s attention for himself and no one else; such jealousy is what brought them to this courtroom in the first place.”

“Let us begin,” the judge says.

Hannibal keeps one eye on Will during the last day of trial, the other watching with amusement as each of the attorney’s for both sides give their closing arguments. After two hours of argument, the jury leaves to deliberate, and the audience leaves for lunch. Hannibal takes Will and Chiyoh to a local *boulangerie* that specializes in *pain de campagne*, freshly-baked, to eat alongside their *bouillabaisse marseillaise*. Will makes an absolutely indecent moan upon his first bite of perfectly-cooked lobster and spiced broth.

Hannibal surreptitiously adjusts his trousers beneath the white tablecloth, ignoring Will’s knowing look when he finishes his bite and then makes eye contact with Hannibal. His next bite is silent, but there is nothing subtle about the way Will purposely licks the spoon once it’s empty, pink tongue darting out and laving the metal with small flicks that nearly send Hannibal pouncing from across the table and throwing Will to the ground.

Chiyoh sighs, long-suffering, and ignores them both.

They stay at the *boulangerie* for less than an hour. Will is desperate not to miss a single second of the jury’s verdict. Hannibal warns him it could be days before the jury arrive at a conclusion, but Will shakes his head, certain it will arrive much quicker than that.

And he is right.

Less than ten minutes after the three of them return to the courthouse, the jury shuffles back into the room and send a spokesperson up to the microphone to deliver their decision.

Guilty.

They find Lisa guilty.

She is sentenced to life in prison without the possibility of parole.

Will is practically vibrating with excitement by the time they leave the courthouse and step into the Bentley.

“I can’t believe it,” he says. His eyes are bright, electric, struck with confidence. “I did it. I *framed* someone for murder.”

“The first victory of many,” Hannibal says. He pulls out of the busy parking lot and drives toward home. “Though I hope that this particular victory does not encourage you to make such plans without me. Your gift to me that night was one I will always cherish, but your safety is the greatest gift of all.”

Will huffs in faux annoyance, then nods. “Yeah, I agree. I don’t want to do anything like that alone again. It was thrilling, but terrifying. I know that because of my age I won’t get in as much trouble, but it still could have ended badly.”

“Yes,” Chiyoh chimes in from the back, “you are lucky Bedelia’s only weapon was her tongue.”

Will snarls at the mention of Bedelia’s name. He grabs onto Hannibal’s elbow, fingernails digging into the expensive fabric of the suit jacket. “I didn’t need a weapon. I could have killed her with my teeth.”

Hannibal shudders at that, vividly imagining Will with blood-soaked lips, Bedelia’s stiff body lying in front of him, simply another sheep led to the slaughter.

Will, of course, immediately picks up on Hannibal’s burgeoning arousal. The little minx grins and merely squeezes Hannibal’s arm that much harder.

At home, Winston greets them with a happy grin and wagging tail. The only remnant of Mason’s attack is the wound on Winston’s ear, a carved-out space that even stitches couldn’t mend. His ear will forever be missing, a half-crescent of skin and fur. Hannibal imagines what would have happened if Winston had not be taken in—had not warned Hannibal of Mason’s attack, helped defend Will from harm—and Hannibal is not ashamed at the tears of gratitude that well up in his eyes upon seeing the dog.

Will bends down to place a kiss on Winston’s nose. He scratches behind the dog’s ears, careful of the scar. “What a good boy. Did you miss me?”

“Only a fool would not mourn your presence, Mylimasis,” Hannibal says.

Chiyoh rolls her eyes and stalks out of the foyer, muttering something about *lovesick fools* under her breath. Hannibal ignores her, eyes never leaving Will (for why would they, when literal perfection is standing right before him?).

Will blushes a charming shade of vermilion and gestures towards the stairs. “I’m ready for you to take me now. You said there wasn’t time earlier, and I feel so *empty* .”

It is a blatant manipulation, yet Hannibal is still not immune to its effects. Instantly his cock is hard and throbbing inside of his trousers, and lust licks up his spine, flames of want that spread into his fingertips and threaten to engulf him until he is nothing more than smoldering cinders on the hardwood floor.

“Yes,” Hannibal growls. “I will always keep you full. You are *mine*.”

Will whines, tips his head back to bare the pale column of his throat. Hannibal had refrained from marking it all week, knowing they would be in public while attending the trial. Now, though, there is nothing stopping Hannibal from biting and bruising every delicious inch of flesh until Will is completely covered in Hannibal’s marks.

Without warning, Hannibal bends down and scoops Will’s small body into his arms. Will giggles, nuzzles his nose into Hannibal’s neck. They quickly walk up the stairs and down the hallway. When they reach their bedroom, Hannibal closes the door, then shoves Will up against it, pinning his body so that he cannot escape, merely writhe as Hannibal sucks one bruise after another against his skin.

“Hannibal!” Will cries. His scent swells with spiced pleasure. Hannibal drinks it in, licks a line up Will’s neck and then traces the shell of his tiny ear. Will’s curls are so long they drag along his shoulders. Hannibal keeps one arm around Will’s waist and uses the other to grip Will’s hair and pull it back, exposing even more of his throat for Hannibal to mark.

“What do you desire?” Hannibal asks, breathless. “Anything. Name it, and it shall be yours.”

Will continues writhing as he says, “I only need you inside me. Please, show me how much you love me.”

Hannibal’s mouth slows, becomes gentle. Soft. He presses kisses along Will’s skin rather than bites. His teeth are sheathed and change to his tongue, sweeping and exploratory. He moves back from the door and sets Will down onto the bed, continuing to loom over the small boy as he unbuttons Will’s suit jacket and slides it to the floor.

Will undresses Hannibal at the same time. They continue swapping soft kisses until their clothing is completely removed, nothing but skin left between them. Hannibal leans down so that his cock drags along Will’s taut stomach. Though Will has gained weight since coming into Hannibal’s care, there is still a leanness to him—sharp hipbones and defined ribs—that might not ever leave. Hannibal adores it, adores the well of Will’s stomach even more. He nips at the delicate skin on Will’s abdomen, then bends lower to take Will’s tiny cock into his mouth.

“*Yes*,” Will whimpers. “So good. You’re so good to me. I love you.”

Hannibal feels like weeping, feels like cradling Will inside of his mouth until the stars turn into black voids that swallow everything in their path. He wishes he could consume Will. Tuck the boy into the space beneath Hannibal's ribs, right next to his heart. Keep Will warm and safe, away from the world. Always for Hannibal.

Though Hannibal cannot consume all of Will, he settles for working Will's cock with his tongue and lips until Will spills down his throat, bitter and salt-laced and divine. Hannibal continues sucking until Will lazily tugs at his hair, then leans back up to grab the lubricant from the drawer of his nightstand.

Will's eyes are heavy-lidded, hazy as Hannibal slicks his fingers and slides them down to Will's hole. Hannibal presses the pad of his index finger against Will's rim, then presses inside. Will's skin is molten hot. Scorching. Almost unbearably tight, even though Hannibal fills his insatiable boy nearly every day (sometimes more than once in a day, if Will is particularly needy, and gods does Hannibal enjoy it when his boy so needy that he simply *takes*).

Hannibal groans as Will's hole slowly flutters around his finger. He adds a second digit, then a third. He purposely ignores Will's prostate, enamored with the way Will squirms and mewls from the stretch.

"Please," Will begs. Tears gather in the corners of his eyes, tiny pieces of sapphire that glisten as they slide down Will's face. Hannibal leans down, licks up the delicate drops. The taste of salt and musk sits heavy on Hannibal's tongue, richer in flavor than any priceless vintage Hannibal keeps shelved in his cellar.

"Please what, darling?"

Will groans as Hannibal scissors his fingers, stretching Will far more than he needs to take Hannibal inside.

"Love me," Will whispers. "Fill me. Make me whole."

"Always," Hannibal whispers back.

He removes his fingers, spreads the excess lubricant along his shaft, then gently begins rocking into Will's soft, pliant body.

"*Hannibal*," Will moans, eyes sliding shut in pleasure. His tiny body rocks back and forth beneath Hannibal's, their torsos slick with sweat, skin gliding with ease as Hannibal rolls his hips with ease.

"Will," Hannibal breathes, keeping his eyes open, not wishing to miss a single second of Will, his pleasure, his ethereal beauty as he takes Hannibal inside, fills him with scorching need. "In all my years, I never could have predicted this. Predicted you."

Will whines. He opens his eyes, tosses his head back against the pillow to reveal the fresh bite marks along his slender throat. "I'm so glad you found me. Every day, I think it. I don't know what I would do without you."

Another tear slips out of the corner of Will's eyes. Hannibal nuzzles the boy's face, feels the soft skin beneath his own, the delicate pulse fluttering in a rhythm that matches the beating of Hannibal's own heart.

"Do not think of it," Hannibal whispers. He continues rolling his hips as he leans down to press his lips against Will's ear. "Think only of me. Of us. There is nothing else that matters, nothing that could separate us now."

Will lets out a tiny hiccup, and Hannibal pulls back, flips them so that Hannibal is lying against the bed, and Will is riding on top. His boy eagerly takes to the new position, firmly planting his hands on Hannibal's chest and using it as leverage to grind down into Hannibal's cock. From here, Hannibal can clearly see his initials carved into Will's skin. The faint red lines that spell *HL* are almost fully healed but still sit starkly against the pale expanse of Will's body.

Hannibal can only sit back and watch with awe. This creature, this boy, *Will*, had slipped his way into Hannibal's heart and lodged there like a precious stone. Hannibal imagines it so clearly, Will's essence condensing into a piece of brilliant lapis lazuli that rests beneath Hannibal's ribs, a solid presence that dictates the beating of his heart, the rhythm of his breath, the very air inside of his lungs.

Hannibal allows his own tears to overflow. They run down the sides of his cheek, land in the blankets below. He is enamored, overcome, overwhelmed.

"If I saw you every day, forever, Will, I would remember this time."

Will gasps at the words, knowing the true depth of their meaning. Hannibal and Will both suffer from eidetic memories, the inability to forget a single moment of their lives no matter how badly they might wish to. They both could bury their memories, perhaps even drown them in alcohol or other substances, but the afterimages of each scene would remain just the same.

But here, now, Hannibal is promising Will that no matter how many days they see one another in the eternities, Hannibal would only want to remember Will as he is now. Above Hannibal. A deity to be worshiped. Someone without fault in Hannibal's eyes.

And for a man like Hannibal, even god themselves is not given such deference or devotion.

Will cries out at the wave of pure, unadulterated *love* pouring from Hannibal's eyes. Will would sense it even without his empathy. He can feel it in the way Hannibal grips his waist, hands soft but desperate, as if even an inch of separation between their skin is too much. He can smell it in the tears pouring from both of their faces, hear it in the synchronous beating of their hearts, see it in the wonder shining in Hannibal's eyes.

"I love you," Will whispers. He bends down and presses a kiss against Hannibal's nose, then his chin. "My *couer*." Will licks into Hannibal's plush lips, whimpering when Hannibal's tongue eagerly presses back, as desperate to devour Will as any dish the older man has created, any wine he has poured.

“Darling—” Hannibal gasps when Will clenches down on the man’s shaft, gripping tightly so that each swivel of Will’s lithe hips is near painful in its pleasure. “I’m close.”

“I know,” Will breathes, refusing to move his lips away. They speak against each other’s mouths, breaths coming faster and faster as they near their peak. “Together. Inside. Let me feel you inside.”

Hannibal groans, and Will’s cock jerks at the noise, dribbling fresh precum onto Hannibal’s toned abdomen. Inside of Will, he can feel Hannibal’s shaft begin throbbing, expanding as it gets ready to empty into Will’s hole.

“God—” Will chokes on his words, keening as he and Hannibal finish together. Hannibal rolls his hips upwards, fucking his spend into Will, filling him up more and more until Will thinks he might burst from it. His own orgasm is a never-ending wave of ecstasy, swell after swell of pleasure running down his spine and into his toes, so powerful it borders on pain.

Will slumps against Hannibal’s chest, feeling sweat and semen stick between their skin but too tired to move.

“Every time,” Hannibal gasps between breaths, “I think it cannot possibly be better than the last. And every time, you prove me wrong.”

Will giggles and rolls off so that he is buried against Hannibal’s side, nose pressed into the older man’s neck. “Proving you wrong *is* one of my favorite things to do.”

“Horrible boy,” Hannibal says, nothing but fondness in his voice.

They lay there for a few minutes, both coming down from the intense high, before Hannibal begins shifting at the uncomfortable feel of sweat drying against his skin. Will rolls his eyes and shoves Hannibal towards the en suite. “Go wash,” he mutters, half-asleep. “You won’t stop fidgeting until you do.”

Will is asleep before Hannibal returns.

When he wakes, Hannibal is dressed and on top of the covers beside him, reading from a book which seems to be written in Japanese (though Will is not yet as good at distinguishing languages as he wants to be).

“Darling,” Hannibal greets, voice warm.

“Hey,” Will mumbles, rubbing the sleep from his eyes. “Wha’ time s’t?”

Hannibal smiles and glances toward the clock. “Nine in the evening. Are you hungry? I made some fresh risotto for dinner.”

Will perks up at the mention of food, but his eyebrows scrunch when he realizes the time. “So late? But what about our plans?”

“They can hold until you’ve eaten. Come, let me help you.”

Will allows himself to be carried to the bathroom where Hannibal washes, dries, and dresses Will to his liking. Will basks in the attention, always at his happiest when Hannibal is focused solely on Will and nothing (and no one) else.

Once Will is bundled in fresh clothing—new linen trousers, a soft cashmere shirt, and socks with tiny dogs that reminded Will of Winston (which Hannibal bought with a barely-concealed sigh)—Hannibal sits Will on his lap and begins feeding him dinner, one bite at a time.

Will feels like an overfull well, buckets of happiness spilling from him and flooding the room, swamping the floor, rising up and up until Will is choking on his own joy.

Will loves it.

He never minded being choked, anyway (not when it is Hannibal stealing his air).

After Will finishes the last bite, Hannibal grabs the empty plate in one hand and Will with the other, carrying both of them downstairs. Chiyoh is nowhere to be found—asleep, perhaps, considering it is now ten o'clock. Winston, however, is wide awake. He gives a soft *woof* of contentment upon seeing Will and Hannibal. His paws tap lightly on the wood floor as he follows them into the kitchen.

Hannibal sets Will onto the counter, then lowers the plate to the floor for Winston to lick clean. Hannibal's face is one of faux-shame as he finishes washing the plate, refusing to respond to Will's wide, knowing grin.

"I never thought I'd feel like the odd one out, but it seems like the two of you have a special bond."

Hannibal gently noses at Will's hairline, a smile on his lips. "I owe Winston all my gratitude for helping save your life; and besides, he is much more effective at pre-rinsing the dishes than a sponge ever was."

Will giggles and hugs Hannibal close to him, simply enjoying the other man's warmth, his sturdy figure. He allows himself to bask in it for a moment, then slides down from the countertop and begins walking toward the pantry.

"You ready?" Will asks, throwing Hannibal a glance over his shoulder.

"I believe I should be the one asking you that question, Mylimasis."

"Oh, I'm ready," Will says, teeth flashing as he bares a sharp grin. "I've been thinking about almost nothing else ever since we returned."

"Then it is time," Hannibal says. He follows Will into the pantry, then down the steps leading to the hidden basement. Hannibal's broad palm remains firmly planted on Will's lower back as they finally reveal themselves to the pitiful figure strapped to the metal table at the center of the room.

Dulcie Veleno has certainly seen better days.

As soon as Hannibal and Will had arrived from (the burnt remains) of her estate, Hannibal and Chiyoh had brought her down here and strapped her limbs down to prevent movement; not because she might escape (her broken arms could not possible undue the tight leather cuffs around her wrists and ankles) but because she might fall and die while alone, and Will was reserving the right to end her life himself, not leaving it to chance or gravity.

“Hello,” Will greets, voice startling cheerful in the gloom of the cavernous room. “Comfortable?”

The IV hooked to Dulcie’s right arm allows a steady drip of nutrients into her veins; just enough to keep her alive, though not mixed with any medication to ease her pain. She jerks at the sound of his voice, but her eyes remain closed.

“Rude,” Will mutters. He goes to one of the stainless steel cabinets, opens a drawer and selects a fresh scalpel as well as a pair of gloves. He will not take any of Dulcie’s organs for consumption; she is not worthy of entering his body, not worthy of nourishing him and Hannibal. She already has infected him with her blood and genetics; Will cannot change his DNA, but he can make sure Dulcie never leaves a mark on him again.

“Has the vision of your tableau changed?” Hannibal asks, his voice betraying nothing but mild curiosity.

“No,” Will replies. He steps up to the table, lowered to accommodate his height (or lack thereof), and gently rests the edge of the scalpel against Dulcie’s shoulder. She is bare, not even a hospital gown to cover her bruised skin. Another way that Will has stripped her of her dignity, her humanity.

Will pictures every time he lacked clothing as a child. Every time his father failed to feed him, shelter him.

Love him.

Each blow that landed on Will’s skin, each bruise that blossomed beneath the surface, each broken bone and torn tendon. The endless nights of hunger and agony, of wishing he were dead (of wishing he had never been born).

All of it, all of that misery, until he met Hannibal.

Hannibal, who clothed Will with the finest fabrics a man can buy. Hannibal, who fed Will the very hearts of those who dared to insult their relationship. Hannibal, who sheltered Will by providing him a home, a bed, a sense of belonging that Will had never experienced before—that Will did not think he ever *would* experience, assuming belonging (like affection) was a made-up concept to trick the masses into complacence.

Hannibal, who loved Will.

Will’s eyes fill with unshed tears, and he quickly wipes them away with the back of his hand, gripping the handle of the scalpel so hard the metal digs into the flesh of his palms. He is a mix of emotions, sorrow for the past (what could have been, if only Dulcie had not

abandoned him), relief (that because of Dulcie's betrayal, Will was able to find Hannibal, his other half), and anger (that even now, Dulcie lived, still believing she had any sort of claim to Will).

With a snarl, Will slides the scalpel beneath the skin on Dulcie's shoulder and begins peeling back the layers, not stopping until he reaches muscle, then bone. He continues down to her elbow, removing her flesh until the bone is exposed.

Hannibal watches from the side, quiet.

Eventually, Will's fury begins to wane, and Dulcie's weak cries of pain with it. She is barely conscious as Will takes a momentary received, blood-soaked and sweating from exertion.

"You are doing wonderful, Mylimasis," Hannibal whispers, the voice of the devil in Will's ear. "Do you require assistance?"

"Yes," Will says, breathless. "Show me. I want to witness her transformation."

For Will's tableau will be a transformation of Dulcie in every sense of the word; she will become what she never had before, what she was never able to give.

Will is going to transform Dulcie into a heart.

Hannibal steps behind Will, then guides him back to the stainless steel table. Hannibal's warm hands envelope Will's tiny fingers, holding tight as Hannibal shows Will exactly what cuts to make, how much pressure to apply, which skin must be pulled off and which can remain in order to complete Will's design.

It takes over seven hours before they are finished.

Will's back and feet are sore, his hands are calloused from holding a scalpel for so long, and there is more blood on Will's clothing and skin than left inside Dulcie's body. Even his eyes water from staring so intently for so long; Will did not want to miss even a moment of this, his first tableau.

And oh, the transformation is *beautiful*.

Cherry-red muscle stretches up in a graceful arc, a final defiance against gravity. It folds at the bottom to create ventricles, the muscles of Dulcie's legs twisted and sculpted into the apex. Along the back of the heart, Dulcie's vertebra provide support for the large tableau, a support that Dulcie never gave during life (and so much of her has only proved useful in death, though Will does not mind the change). The ligaments in her neck remain as the heart's aortas, though no part of her trachea or skull can be seen; she has no need to talk or think, now. The raw materials of her body have created a finer love than her tongue ever could.

"It's perfect," Will whispers.

"Yes," Hannibal replies, but his eyes are only on Will.

Together, they shower off the blood and viscera from their bodies, then fall into bed just as the sun is beginning to rise. They wake around noon, both famished, and join Chiyoh and Winston in the kitchen for a late lunch.

"And what is the schedule for today?" Chiyoh asks, eating a small bite of *panzanella*, the sharp scent of vinegar wafting from her fork. "We are off to a rather late start."

"Unusual," Hannibal concurs, looking down at Will with a look of such ardent affection that it nearly overwhelms Will's empathy and causes him to faint. "But Will and I had to finish an important task before sunrise."

"Before the meat spoiled," Will says. Not that they would eat any part of Dulcie Veleno—she was poison, after all—but the meat had to be fresh in order to be sculpted into its final form. Will takes a bite of the salad, then asks Chiyoh, "Will you be helping us with the display?"

"No," Chiyoh says. "I have seen my share of tableaux. Far be it from me to stop you or Hannibal in your…artistic endeavors, but there is line I must draw when it comes to participation."

Will nods, understanding. "I'm not mad. I just didn't want you to feel left out. You are our family."

Chiyoh sniffs, clearly trying to hide her emotions from Will, but it is no use. Will can sense her gratitude (her relief at finding a place for herself among people she loves) as though it were his own.

"Thank you," she whispers, and the conversation shifts to the upcoming psychiatric conference Hannibal has been invited to attend alongside his mentor.

That evening, an hour or so before the sun has disappeared long the western horizon, Hannibal and Will walk back down to the basement and set their finished creation onto a stainless steel cart. Dulcie's 'heart' is heavy, but Hannibal is used to lifting entire bodies much larger than hers; Will cannot help the blatant arousal that flares through him upon seeing Hannibal's strength displayed so effortlessly. It is almost enough to have Will begging for a quick round before they have to leave (preferably with Hannibal's muscular arms wrapped around Will's waist, keeping him completely off of the ground as Hannibal fills Will up over and over again), but time is of the essence, and there is always later for such things.

Hannibal had replaced the getaway car which Will and Chiyoh drove to the cliffs. A new car is now parked at the end of the tunnel beneath Hannibal's home, this one a silver sedan that has more than enough trunk space for the tableau to be stored during their journey.

Hannibal opens Will's door for him—Will blushing at the sweet gesture, enamored no matter how many times it has happened—then walks around the car to the driver's side.

As they pull into the rapidly-cooling night, Will says, "We don't have to display it, you know." He bites on his bottom lip, sucks up the fresh blood that swells onto his skin. "I don't want you to get into trouble."

“Darling,” Hannibal says. He glances over at Will, extends a hand across the center console so that the two of them can be touching. “This design is yours. Completely. If you wish it to remain private, no one will appreciate your art more than I. However, if safety is what you are concerned about, know that I have more-than-ample experience in displaying such things, and never before have I been caught.”

“But you have!” Will cries out, releasing Hannibal’s hand so that he can tug on his curls with his fingers. “You *have* been caught. Dulcie’s private investigator took pictures of you killing Linda Roche. He even followed us to Italy. How can you be sure that you will be safe?”

Hannibal pulls over to the side of an empty street and takes off his seatbelt, turns so that he is completely facing Will. Hannibal’s eyes are mired in grief, guilt. He reaches out and grabs Will’s chin so that Will is forced to stare the older man in the eye. “Oh my dear boy, how I have failed you.”

“No,” Will chokes out, surprised to find tears running down his face, dripping off his chin and into the collar of his shirt. “Never. You have *never* failed me.”

“But I have,” Hannibal replies, voice almost silent. “I let you come to harm, when I promised to always keep you safe. I let you be taken from me, when I promised to always keep you by my side. And now, I fear that my promises are worthless to you because I have broken so many before.”

Will shakes his head and scrambles over the center console, climbs onto Hannibal’s lap and wraps his arms around Hannibal’s neck.

“No,” Will repeats. He buries his face into Hannibal’s hair, enjoys the familiar scent of goat’s milk and sandalwood as a balm to his rapidly-beating heart. “I *love* you, Hannibal. And that means I trust you. Neither of us could have prepared for Dulcie, but in the end, even with all her resources and connections, she still couldn’t stop you from saving me. It’s not that I don’t trust you, Hannibal. I just worry because I love you. I don’t think I will ever stop worrying about you.”

“Nor I, you,” Hannibal replies. He gently massages Will’s back, his broad palms sweeping up, then over to Will’s shoulder blades, before finally running down Will’s sides before beginning the process all over again. With each pass of Hannibal’s talented hands, Will feels his anxiety dwindle, melt, disappear along with his doubts.

“Okay,” Will eventually says, pulling back so that he can look into Hannibal’s face. He notes the red-tinge around Hannibal’s eyes, the dried tears along his sharp cheekbones. Will bends down and licks up the remaining salt, content now that he has the taste of Hannibal on his tongue.

“Okay?”

“Yeah, okay. I trust you to keep both of us safe. And I trust myself to know that this, displaying what we created together, is really what I want.”

Hannibal beams, and the crinkles that appear around his maroon eyes make Will's heart nearly leap from his chest, so overcome with love for the man that Will isn't sure how he ever survived without Hannibal, the very air he needs to breathe, the blood pumping through his veins, the voice inside his head that keeps him sane when everything else falls away.

"Then let us proceed," Hannibal says. "I am so proud of you, Will. So, so proud."

Will chokes out a small gasp and crushes his lips to Hannibal's. They stay like that for a few moments (or longer, Will isn't sure), the taste of salt and love swapped between their tongues, hot breath fogging up the windows of the car. When Will finally pulls back, Hannibal's hair is in complete disarray from Will's fingers, his lips are plush and swollen, and his pupils have dilated so large that almost no maroon is left to be seen.

"Thank you, *coeur*," Will says. He forces himself to crawl off Hannibal's muscular thighs and back onto the cold, unfeeling leather of the passenger seat. "I'm ready."

They drive for another thirty minutes until they arrive at an abandoned chapel not far off the interstate. Will had spotted it once when Hannibal had driven him to a nearby restaurant, but it wasn't until Will returned from Georgia that the chapel reappeared in his mind as the perfect final resting place for Dulcie; both abandoned places where saints once appeared.

"It's perfect," Will breathes, emerging from the car with shaking hands and a manic grin. He feels something bubbling beneath the surface of his skin, some swirling mixture of excitement and anticipation and darkness that feels so damn good he can hardly believe it's real.

It is here, in this rotting church with its sunken-in roof and doors that hang from their hinges, that Will is finally *becoming*. Where he will elevate himself to a god by sacrificing a work of art at his own altar, just as Hannibal had done in another abandoned chapel almost a decade ago.

Here, Will and Hannibal will form a union that no god or priest would ever sanction, that no heaven would ever bless. Here, Will and Hannibal will finally become one, binding themselves together in blood and viscera rather than rings of gold. And as Will glances back at Hannibal, this beautiful, terrible, awe-inspiring man more devoted to Will than any acolyte has ever been to a deity or religion, as Will watches Hannibal labor to bring their heart up the crumbling steps of the church and through the nave before finally placing it on the broken altar, Will thinks that, maybe, he finally understands what the prophets of old meant when they said, *thou hast made us for thyself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it finds its rest in thee.*

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